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#4

I HEART SKULL CRUSHER!



I HEART SKULL-CRUSHER!

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WELCOME
BACK TO

GROUP
A

WE'VE MADE
IT THROUGH THE
FIRST ROUND. BUT NOW
IT'S TIME FOR PODUNK
LIL' TEAM TO
FACE...

100%
LIL' TEAM

LIL' TEAM

LIL' TEAM



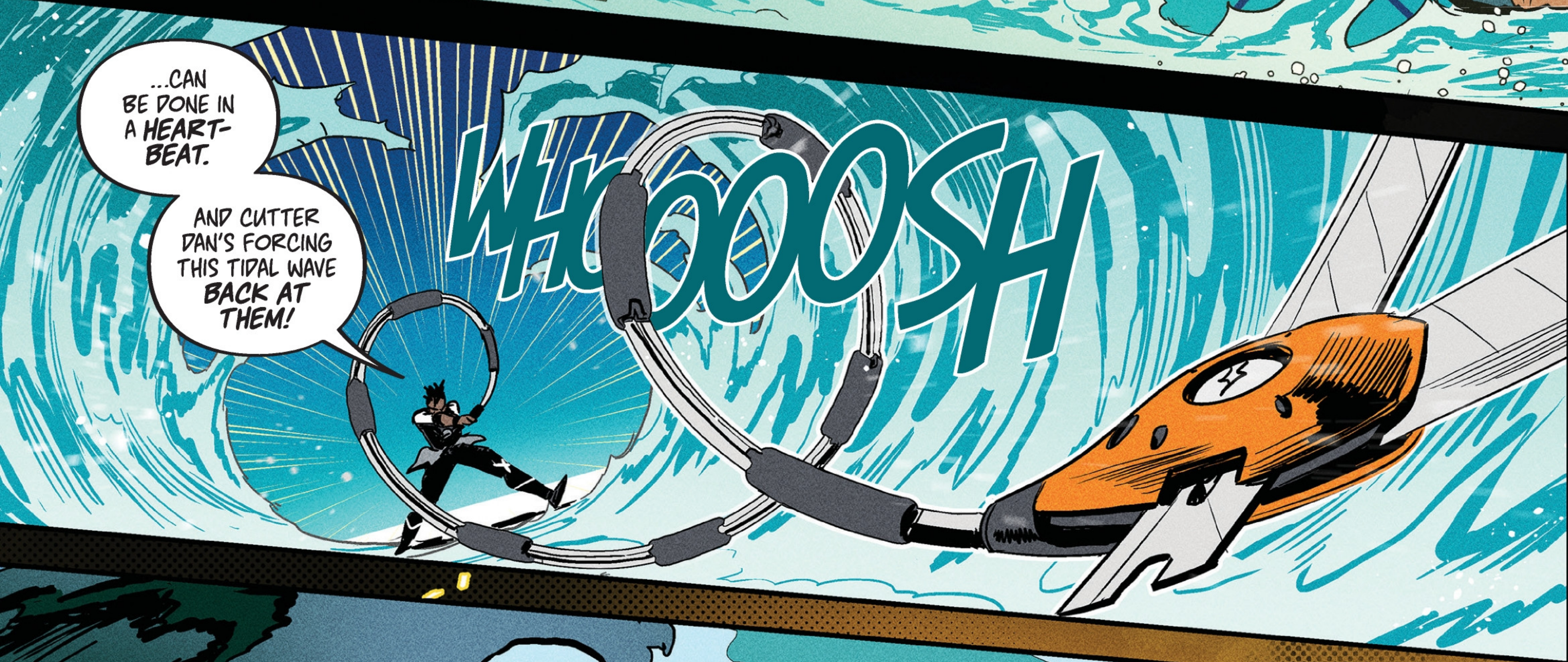
...THE
NEO NAVADA
NETS!

THIS
GLADIATORIAL TEAM
USES ALL ELECTRIC
WEAPONS...

...WHICH MEANS THE
TYRANT SURPRISE--
FLOODING THE ARENA--
CAN ONLY HELP THE
NETS!

THIS IS THEIR
SIGNATURE MOVE:
THE ELECTRO-
GRAPPLE.

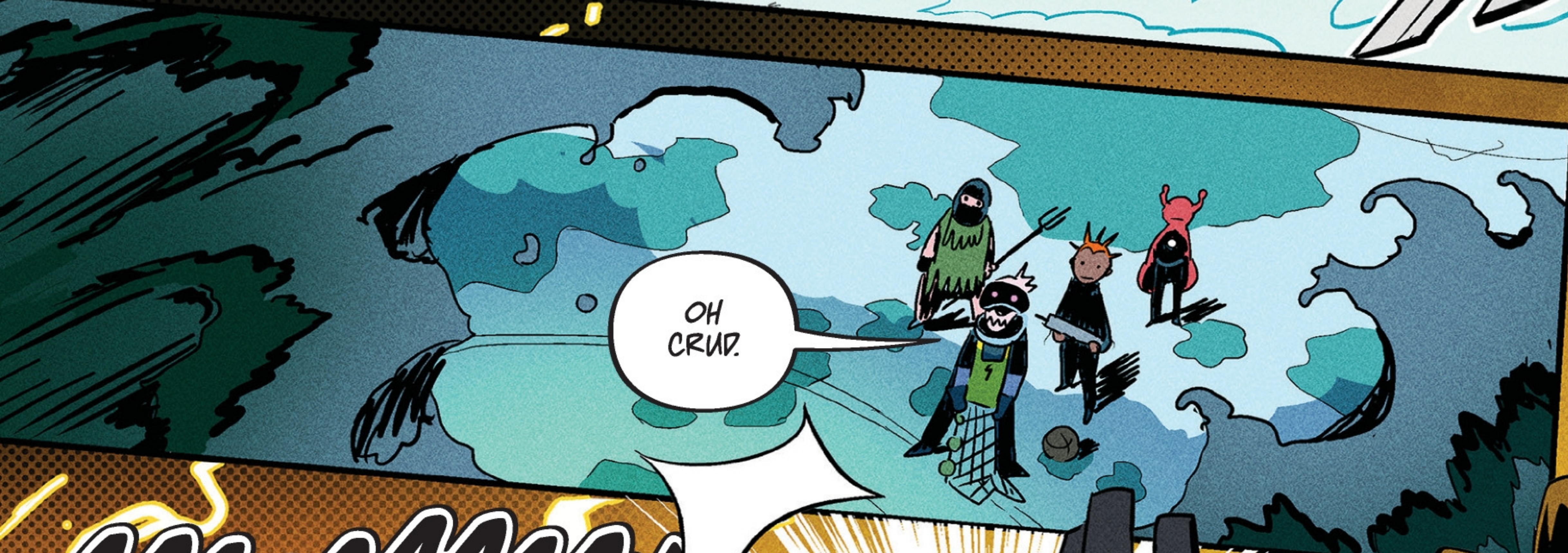
BUT IT TAKES
FIVE POINT ONE SECONDS
TO EXECUTE. WHILE DAN'S
MOVE...



...CAN
BE DONE IN
A HEART-
BEAT.

AND CUTTER
DAN'S FORCING
THIS TIDAL WAVE
BACK AT
THEM!

WHOOOSH



OH
CRAP.



AAAAA

GREAT
WORK, EXCEPT
SKULL-CRUSHER
IS STILL BETTER
THAN YOU.

HARD
DISAGREE.

PODUNK
SCORES THE FINAL
MURDER POINT OF
THE MATCH!

BUT
WHAT ARE
THEIR CHANCES
AGAINST...

THE
HOMES

...THE
BOMBERS!

THINK
ON YOUR
SINS...

...AND REPENT
WITH YOUR
LIFE!

IT'S
NOT LOOKING
GOOD FOR
PODUNK!

BOM BOOM BOOM

ESPECIALLY
SINCE THE ACID RAIN
TYRANT SURPRISE HAS
LEFT ONLY PODUNK
WOUNDED!

CIRCLE
TWIN...USE THE
FORCE...OF THE
BLASTS...

HOLY
BAD WEEK!
THE PARTS ARE BEING
PROPELLED BY THE
EXPLOSION...

...AND PODUNK
WINS WITH A FIVE-
POINT MURDER
KNOCKOUT!

I
GOT YOU,
TRINI! TAKE
THAT!

YAY...CIRCLE!
HEY, WHAT'S
YOUR...REAL
NAME?

NOPE!

"MOM, DAD. WHAT IS THIS FEELING?"

5/5



THE DEAD-CITY DRILLS!

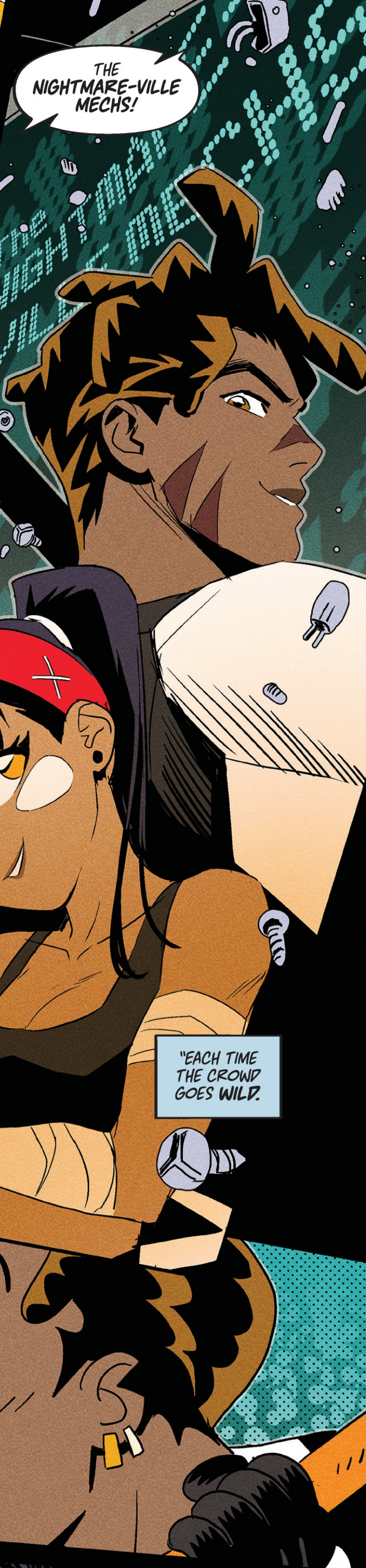
"IT'S LIKE LIGHTNING STRIKING MY HEART."

THE DEAD-CITY DRILLS



THE FOREVER-WAR WARRIORS!

"IT GROWS EACH TIME WE WIN."

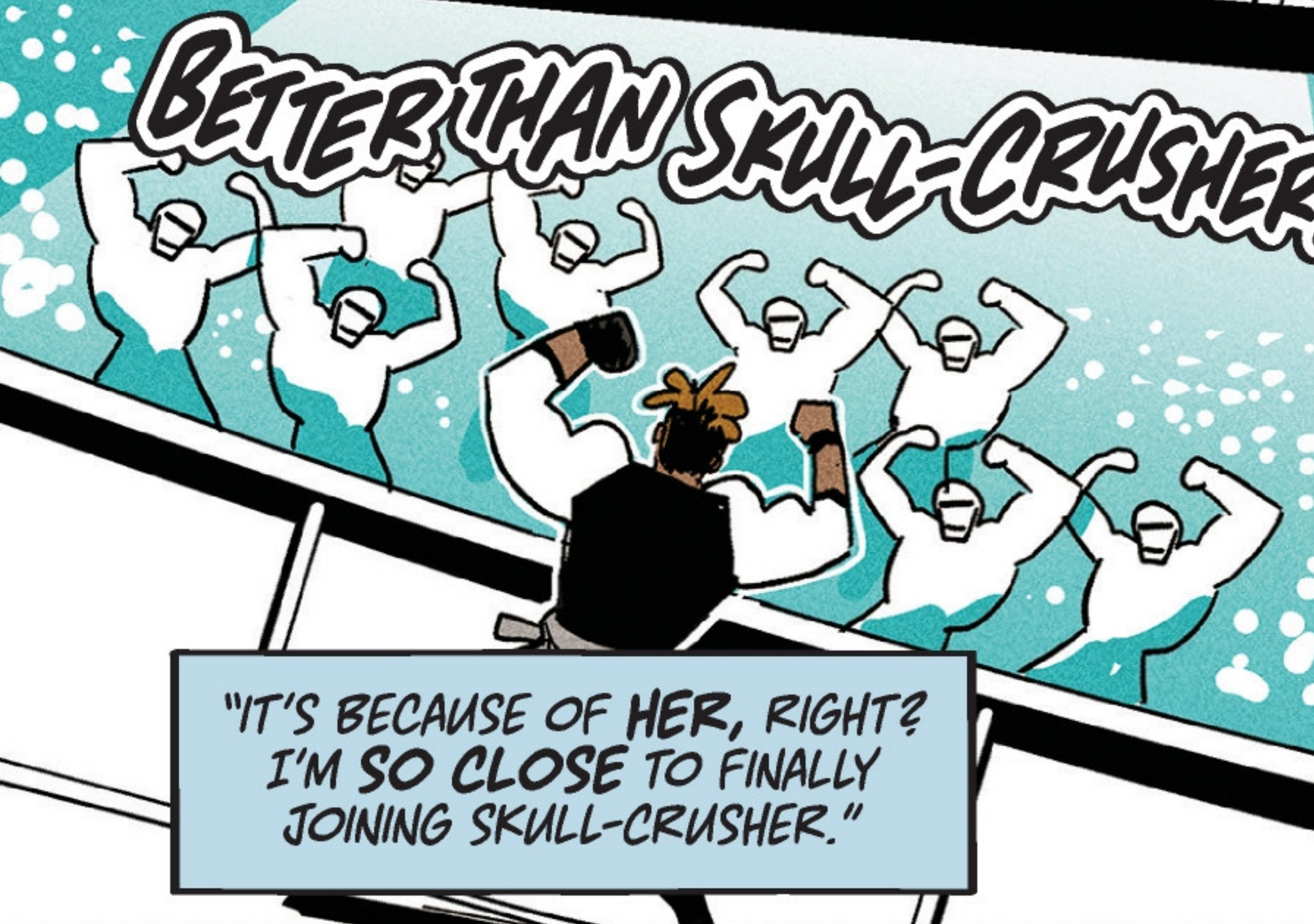


THE NIGHTMARE-VILLE MECHS!

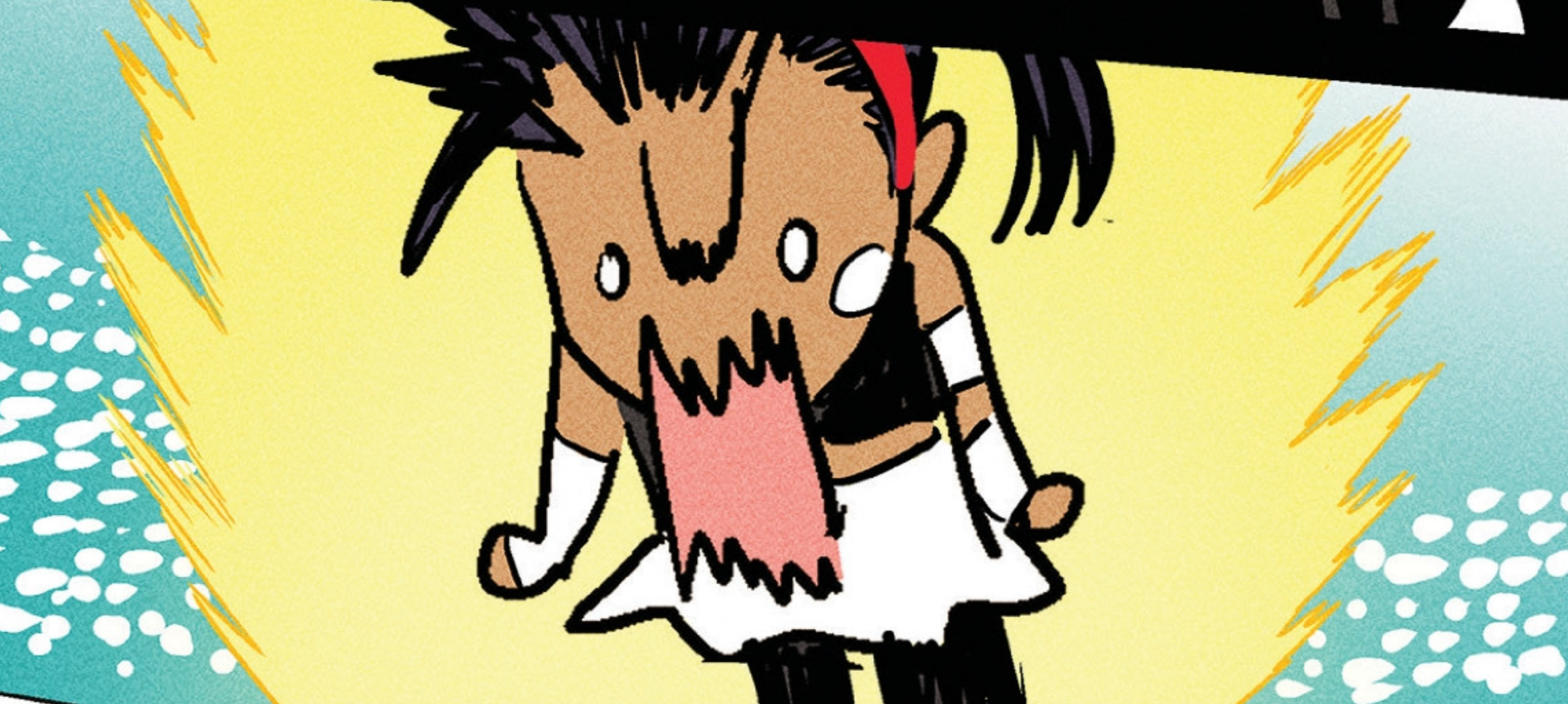
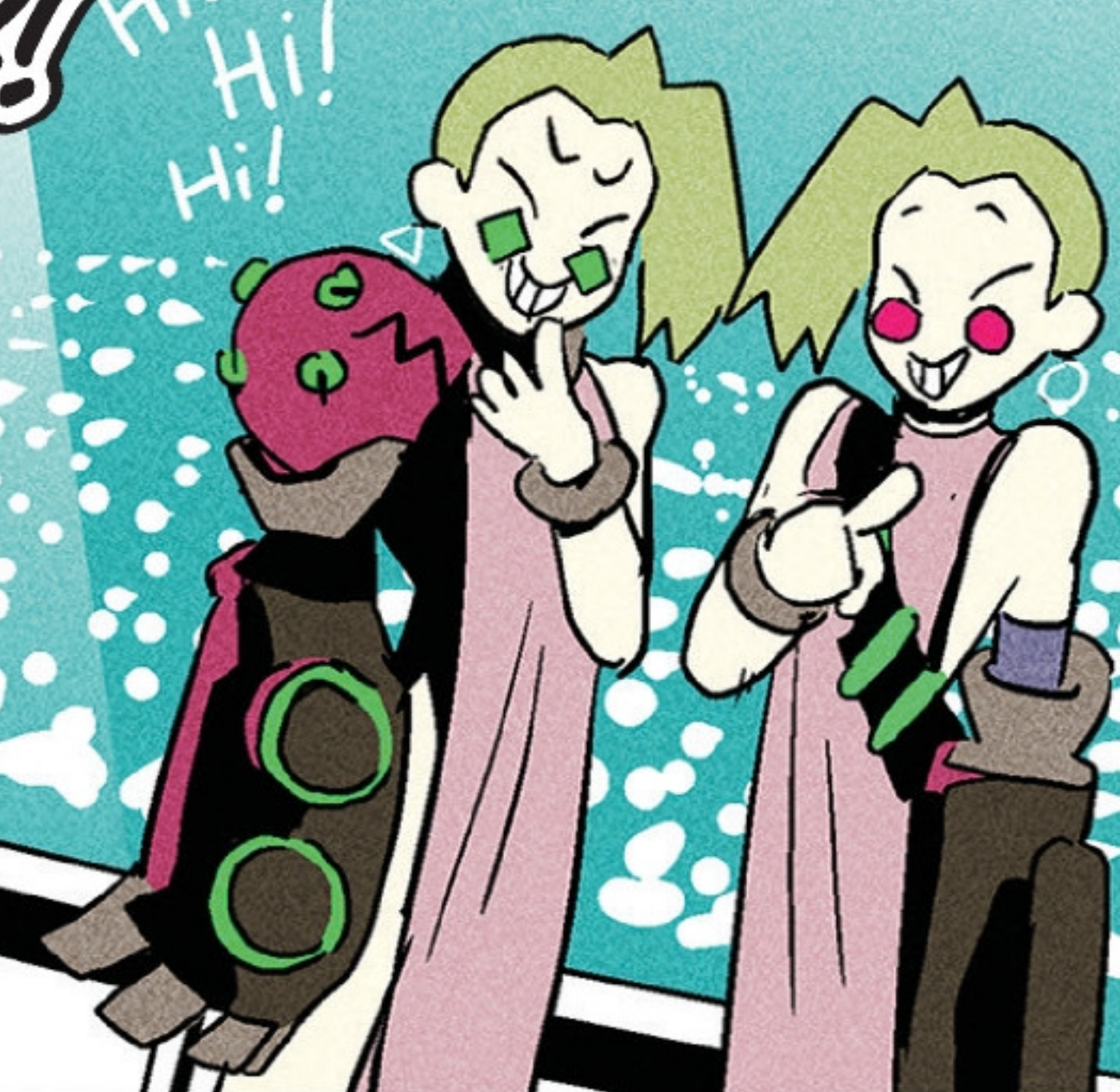
"EACH TIME THE CROWD GOES WILD."



"EACH STEP CLOSER TO MY DREAM."



"IT'S BECAUSE OF HER, RIGHT? I'M SO CLOSE TO FINALLY JOINING SKULL-CRUSHER."



"TO FINALLY ACHIEVING
MY LIFELONG GOAL."

"THAT'S GOTTA
BE IT...RIGHT?"

TOMORROW
IS THE FINALS MATCH.
WHOEVER WINS WILL GET TO
JOIN SKULL-CRUSHER'S
TEAM.

WHICH MEANS
SKULL-CRUSHER
WILL BE THERE!

PUSH
HARDER!

MAYBE IF EVERYONE
HELPED, WE'D GO
FASTER.

I'M
DELICATE.
I'VE GIVEN UP
DRINKING, AND
GOTTA PRIORITIZE
MY HEALTH.

REALLY?

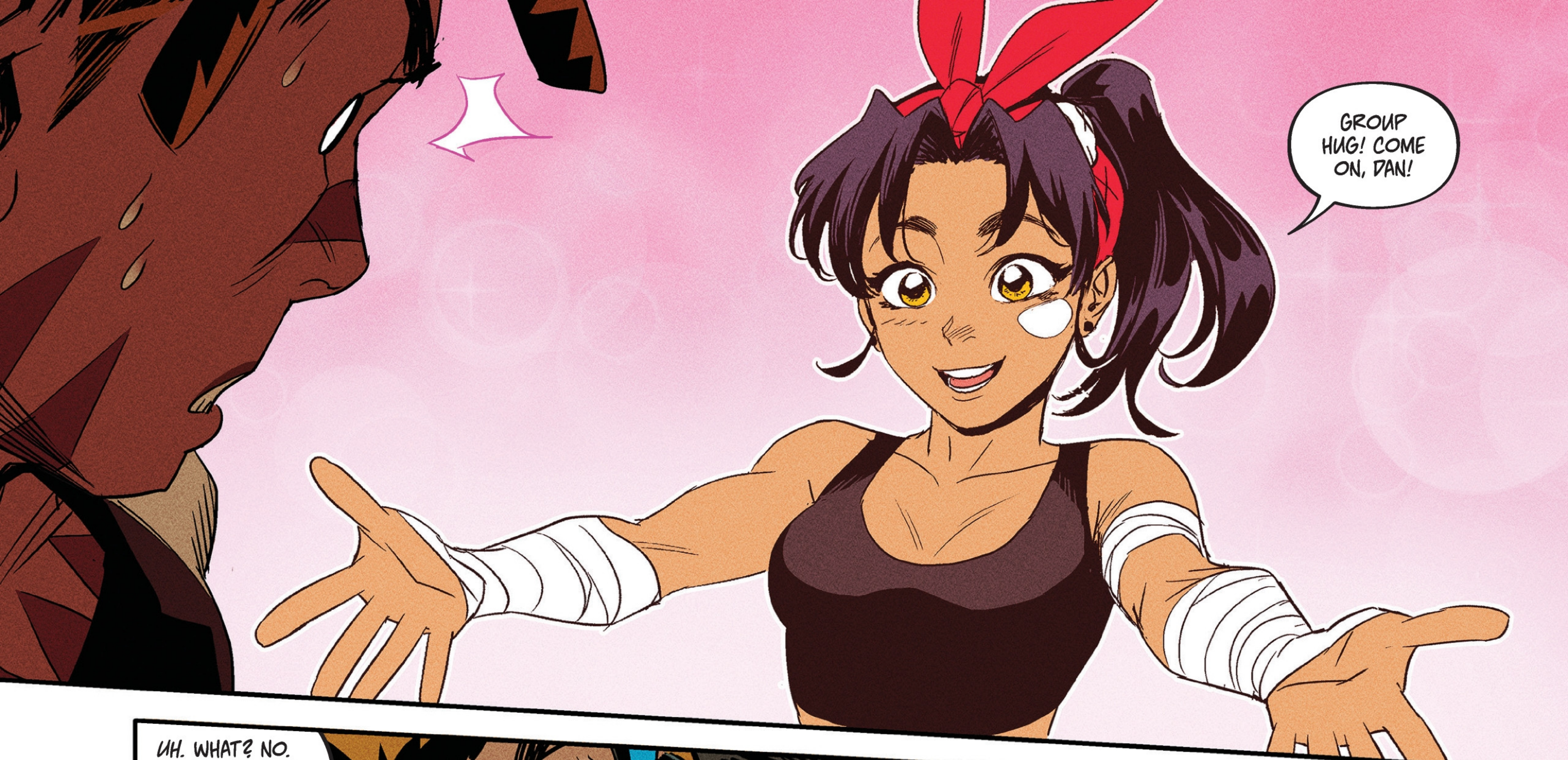
YOU
KNOW I DIDN'T
HAVE A CHOICE.
BESIDES...

WE MIGHT
JUST GET
OUT OF THIS
ALIVE.

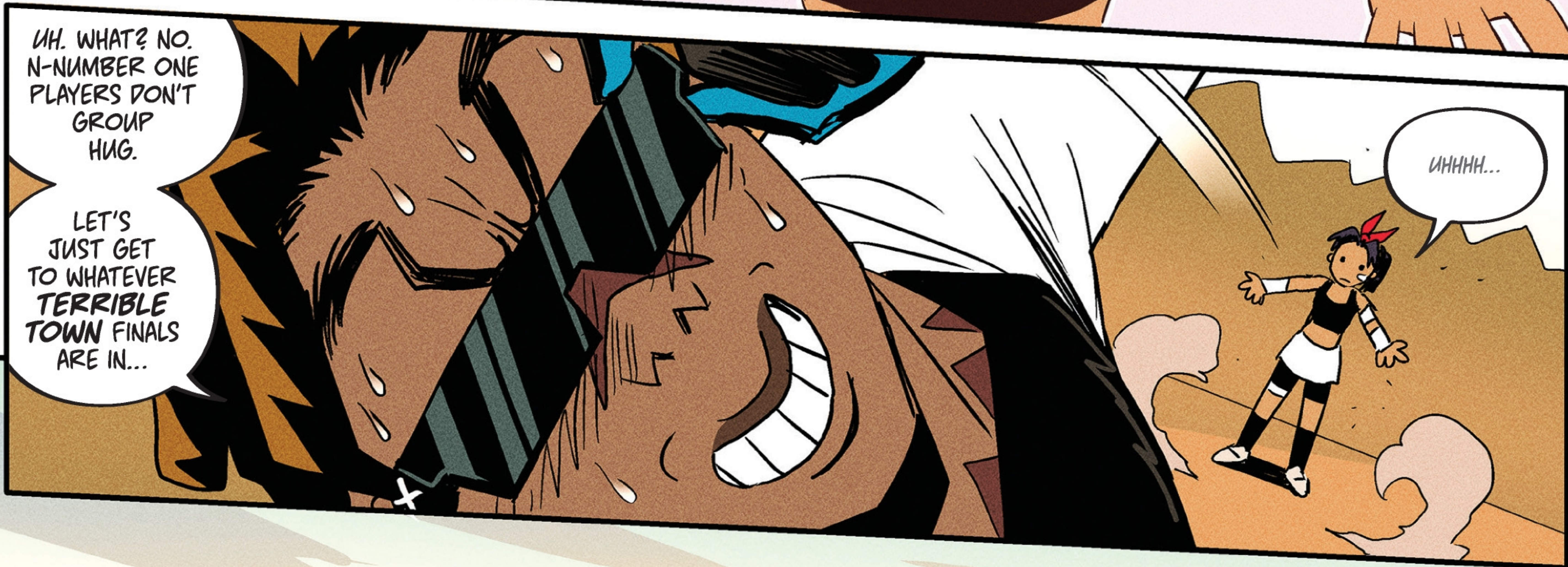
COOOOAAAAACH!

OH
GOD, WHY ARE
YOU DOING
THIS?

I TAKE
IT ALL BACK!
STOP IT!



GROUP
HUG! COME
ON, DAN!



UH. WHAT? NO.
N-NUMBER ONE
PLAYERS DON'T
GROUP
HUG.

LET'S
JUST GET
TO WHATEVER
TERRIBLE
TOWN FINALS
ARE IN...

UHHHH...



LOOKS
LIKE WE'RE...
HERE...

WHOA.
WHAT IS
THAT?

A
LAKE. YOU'RE
LOOKING AT A
LAKE.

WELCOME
TO CRATER
TOWN.



YOU KNOW THIS PLACE?

ONLY BY RUMOR.



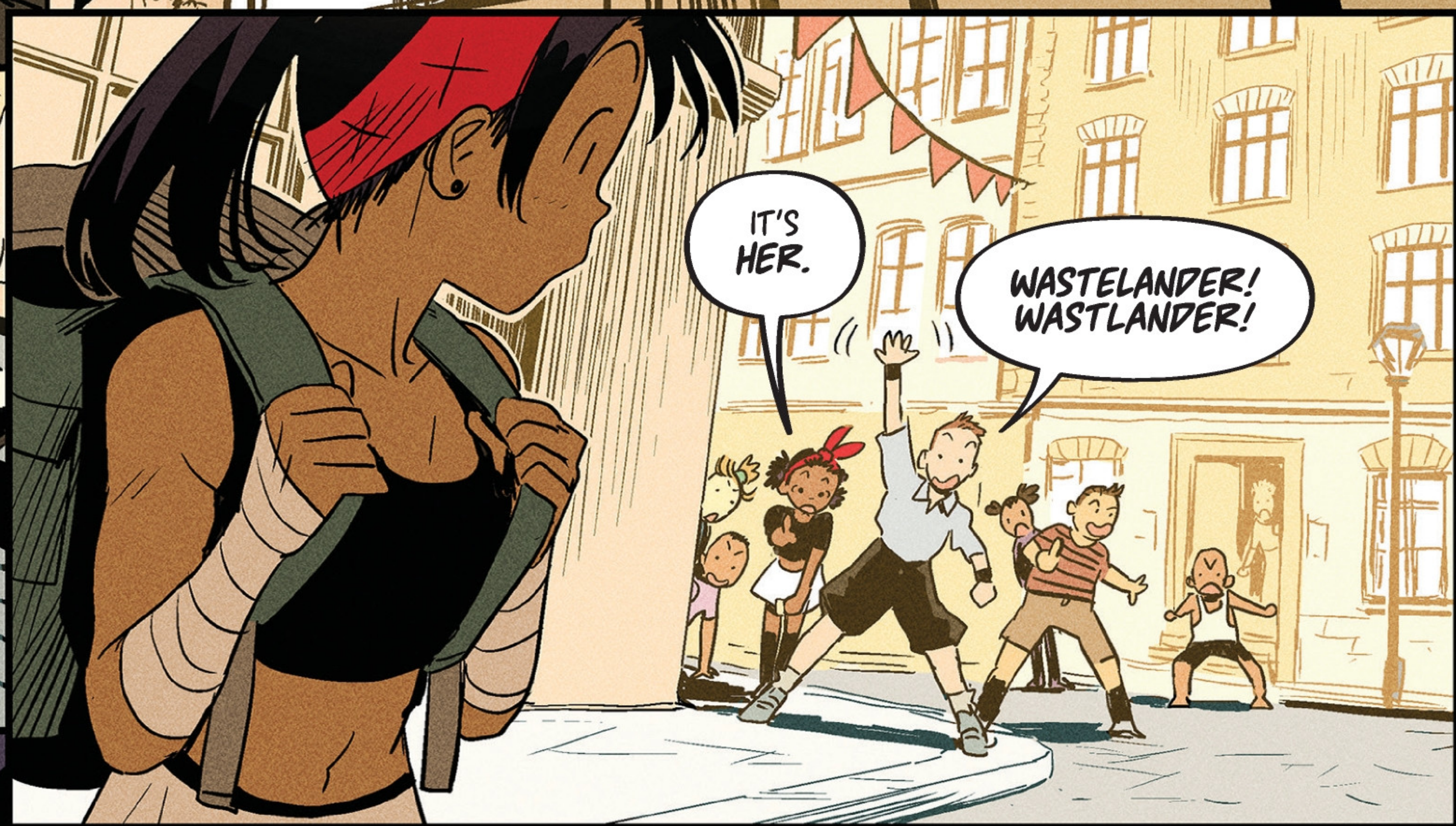
IT'S ONE OF THE LAST LAKES AFTER THE BAD WEEK.
I'M SURPRISED IT'S STILL HERE.

YEAH. CRAZY THE MURDER WINDS HAVEN'T DESTROYED IT YET.



THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT.

WHOA.



IT'S HER.

WASTELANDER! WASTELANDER!



"MOM, DAD. THIS FEELING I HAVE INSIDE..."

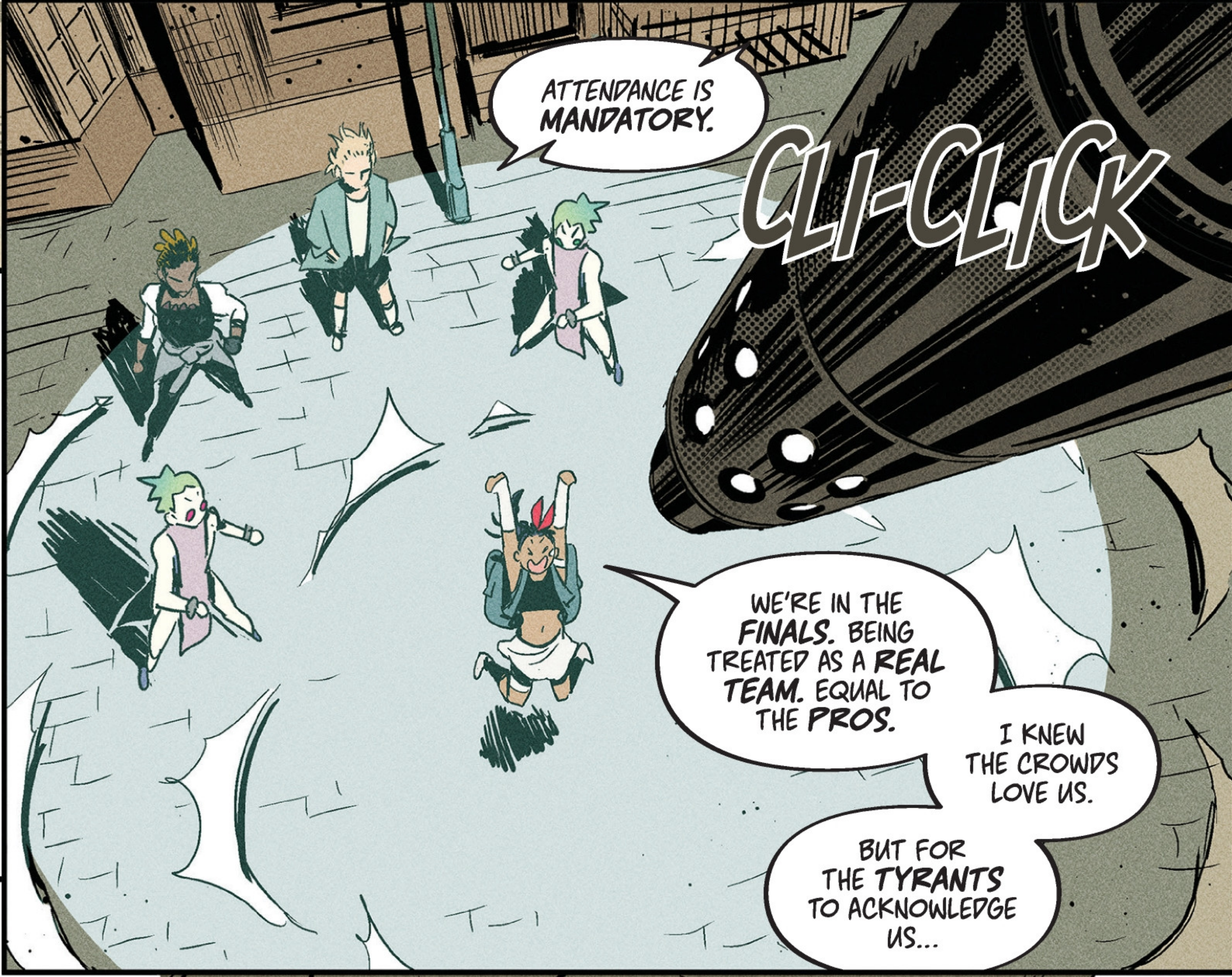
"...IS THIS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO WIN?"



PODUNK TEAM! YOUR TIME HAS COME!



...AND BY THAT I MEAN YOU ARE INVITED BY OUR BELOVED TYRANTS TO THE FINALIST DINNER!



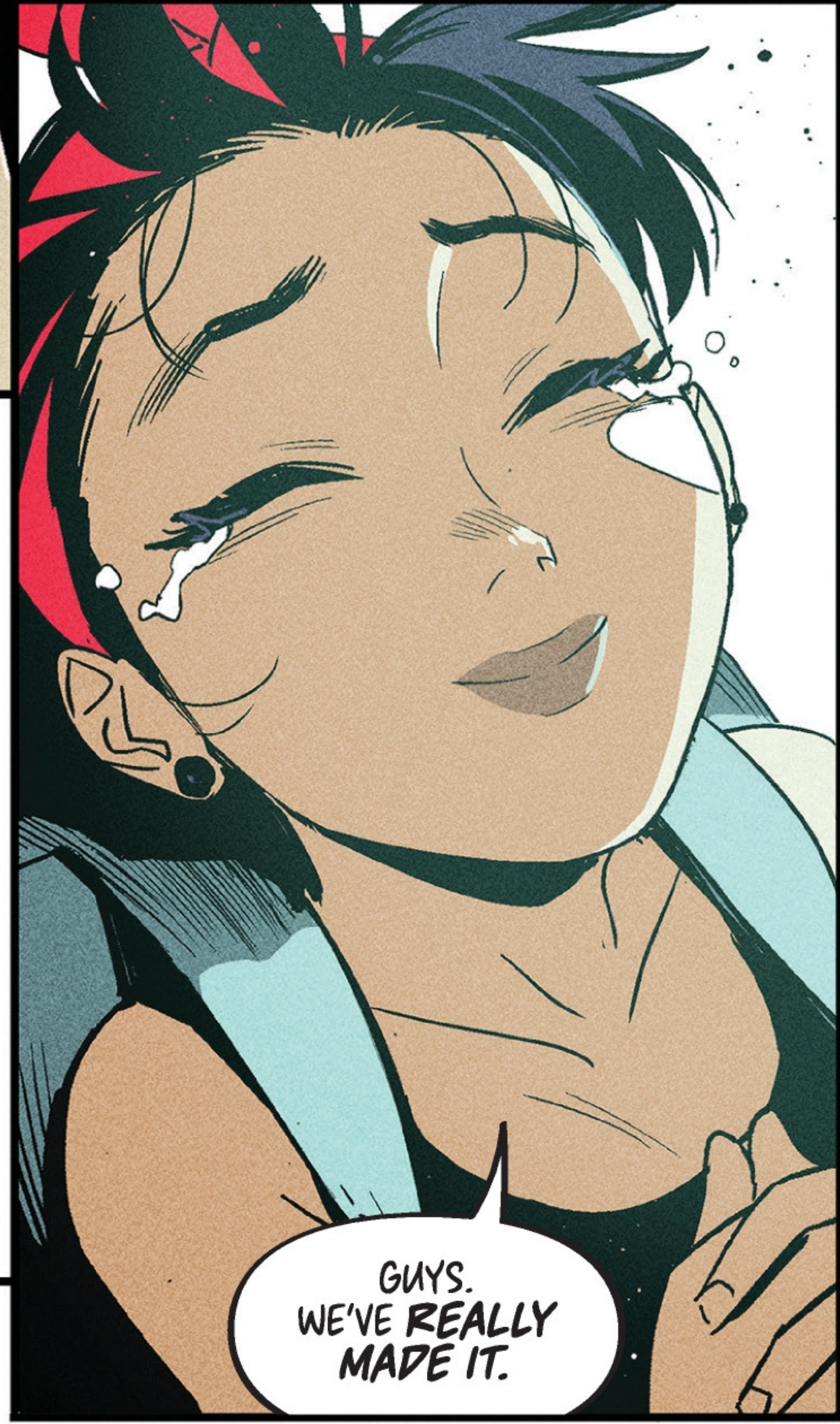
ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY.

CLI-CLICK

WE'RE IN THE FINALS. BEING TREATED AS A REAL TEAM. EQUAL TO THE PROS.

I KNEW THE CROWDS LOVE US.

BUT FOR THE TYRANTS TO ACKNOWLEDGE US...



GUYS. WE'VE REALLY MADE IT.



...RIGHT?



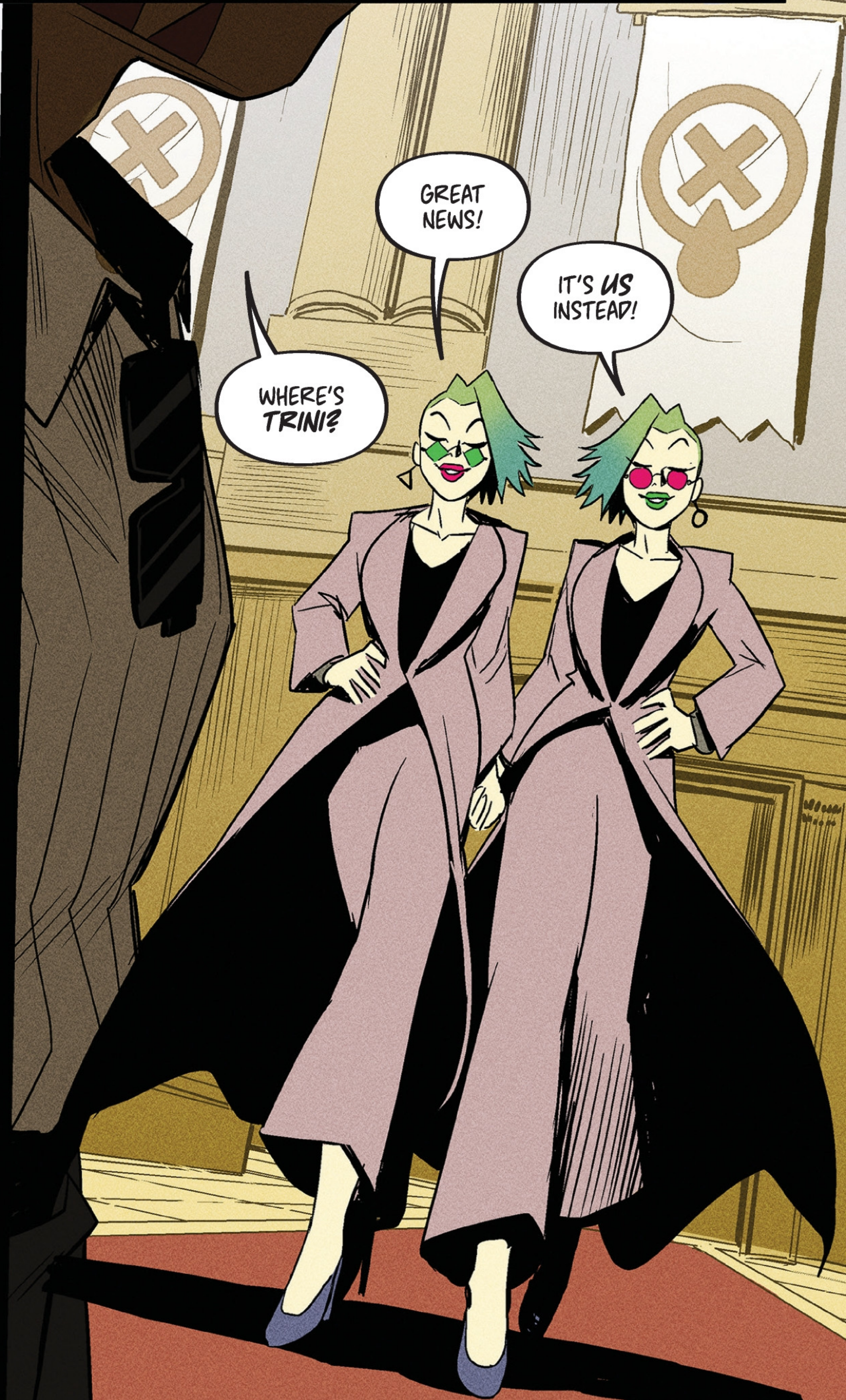
SIX HOURS LATER. THE FINALIST DINNER.

COME ON. WHERE IS EVERYONE?



FINALLY!

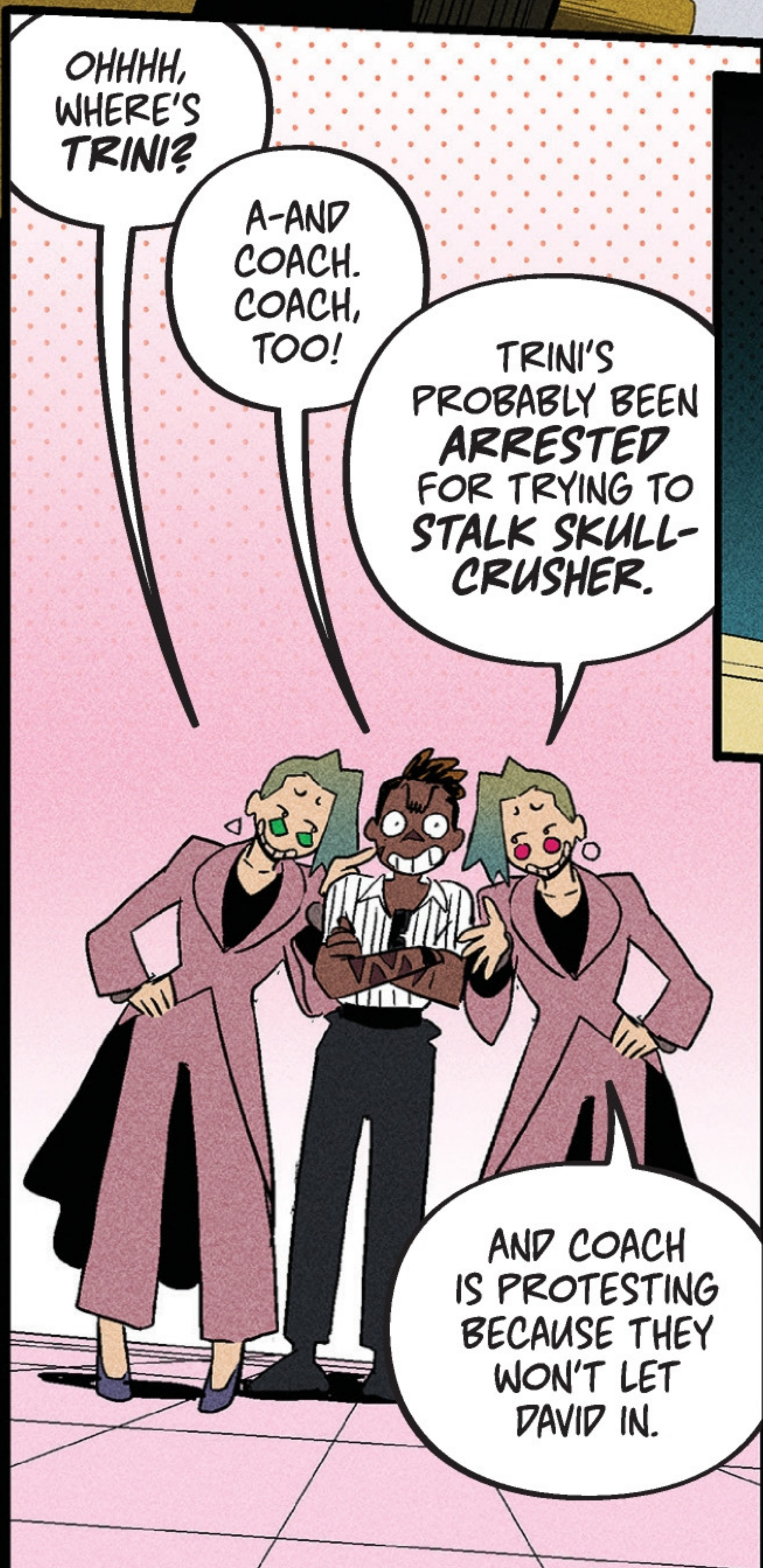
T-TRINI...?



GREAT NEWS!

IT'S US INSTEAD!

WHERE'S TRINI?



OHhhh, WHERE'S TRINI?

A-AND COACH. COACH, TOO!

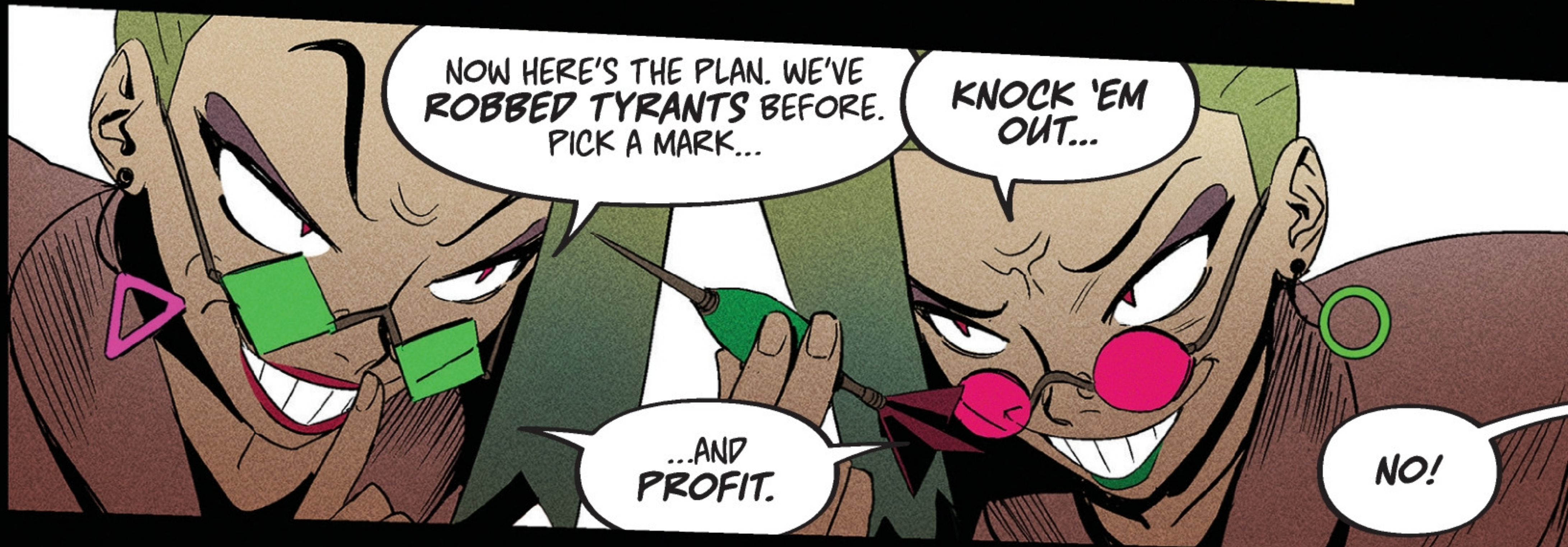
TRINI'S PROBABLY BEEN ARRESTED FOR TRYING TO STALK SKULL-CRUSHER.

AND COACH IS PROTESTING BECAUSE THEY WON'T LET DAVID IN.



THIS IS ANTI-MUTANT BEAR-MAN SENTIMENT!

IT'S JUST A BEAR!

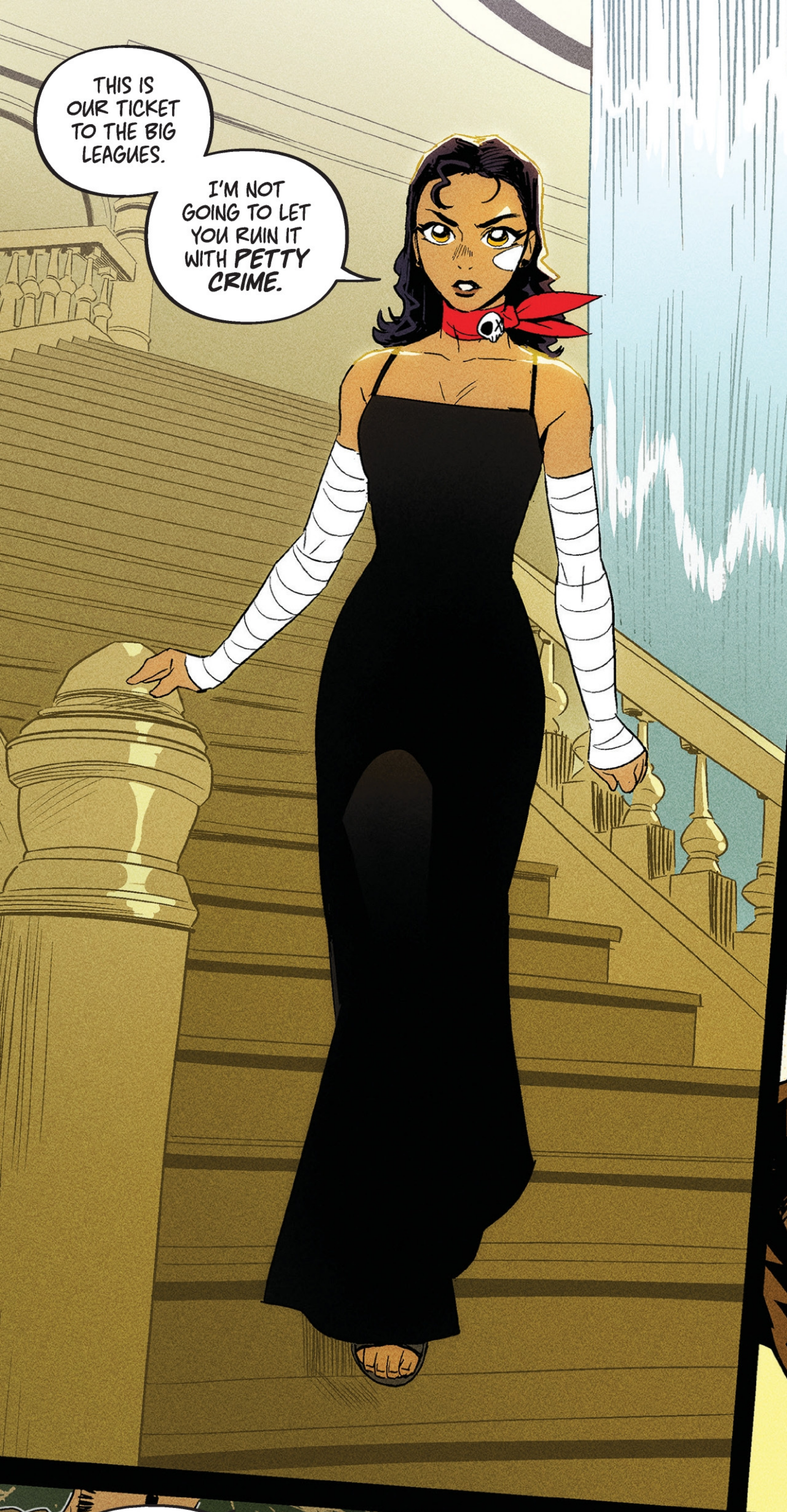


NOW HERE'S THE PLAN. WE'VE ROBBED TYRANTS BEFORE. PICK A MARK...

KNOCK 'EM OUT...

...AND PROFIT.

NO!



THIS IS OUR TICKET TO THE BIG LEAGUES.

I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU RUIN IT WITH PETTY CRIME.



WOW.

I-I MEAN--

Y-YOU TOO. YOU L-LOOK... WOW--

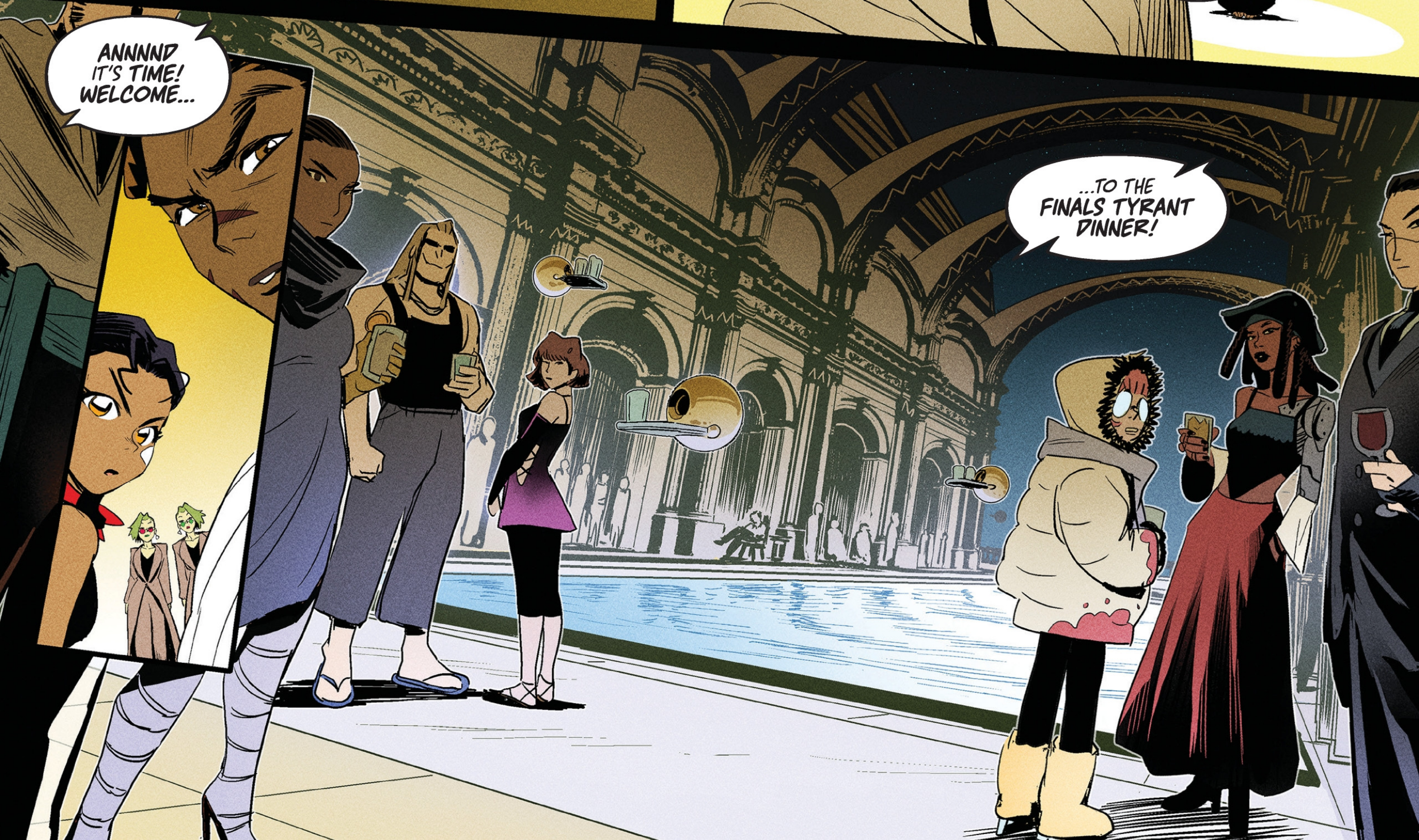
REALLY?



G-GREAT PLAYERS DON'T LIE! THEY ALSO TURN AROUND AND PUT ON SUNGLASSES TO OBSCURE THEIR FACES!

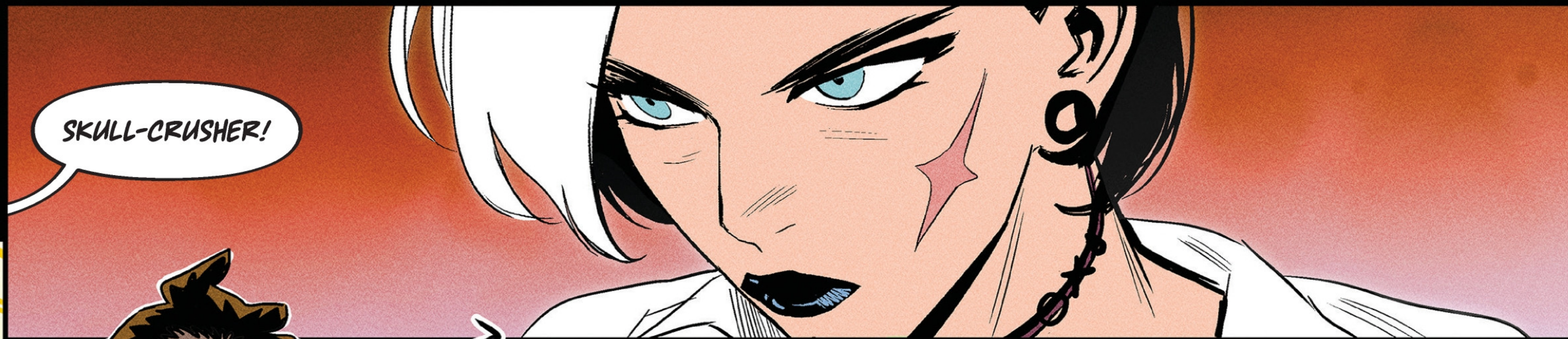
UHHH...

IT'S FINE!

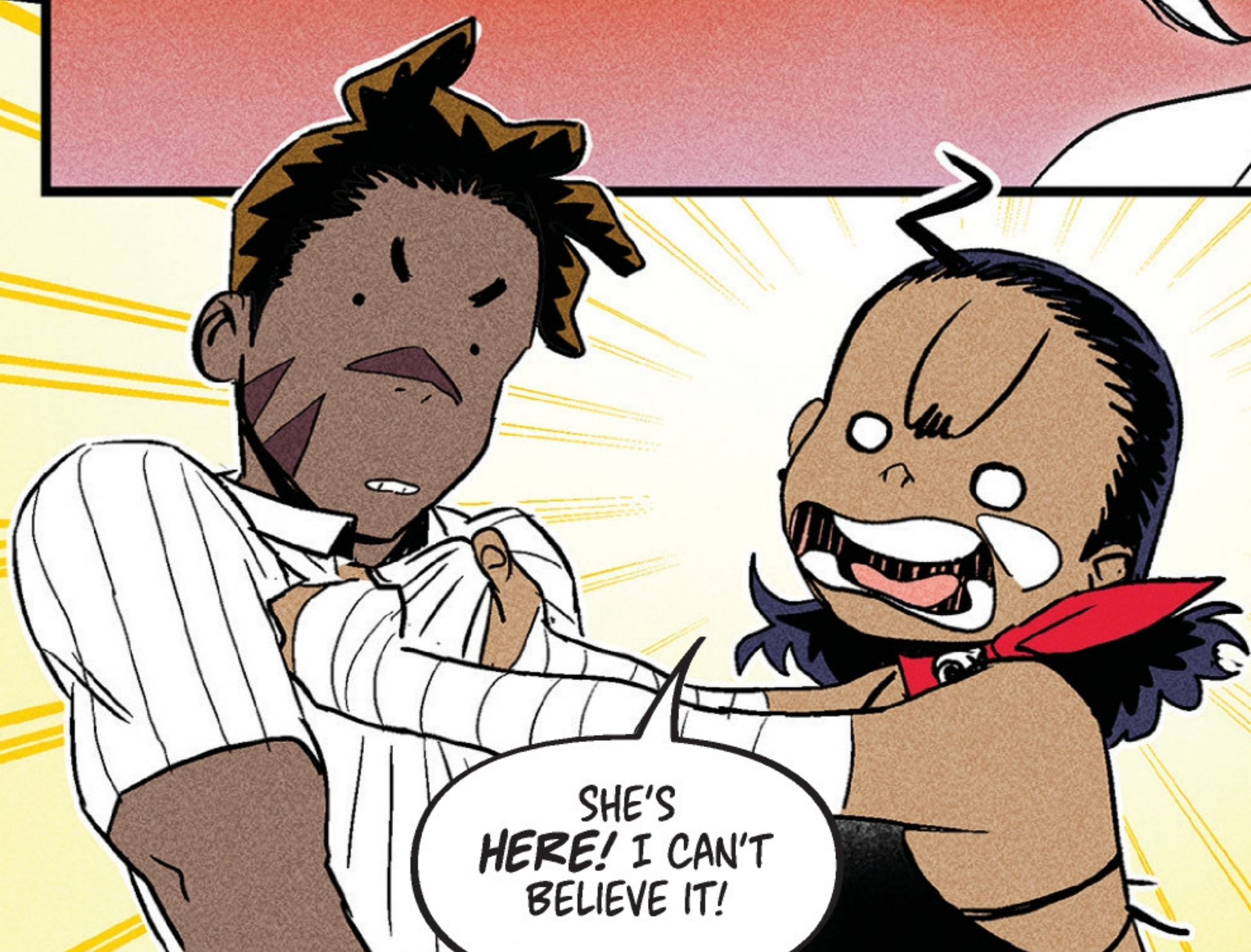


ANNNND IT'S TIME! WELCOME...

...TO THE FINALS TYRANT DINNER!



SKULL-CRUSHER!



SHE'S
HERE! I CAN'T
BELIEVE IT!



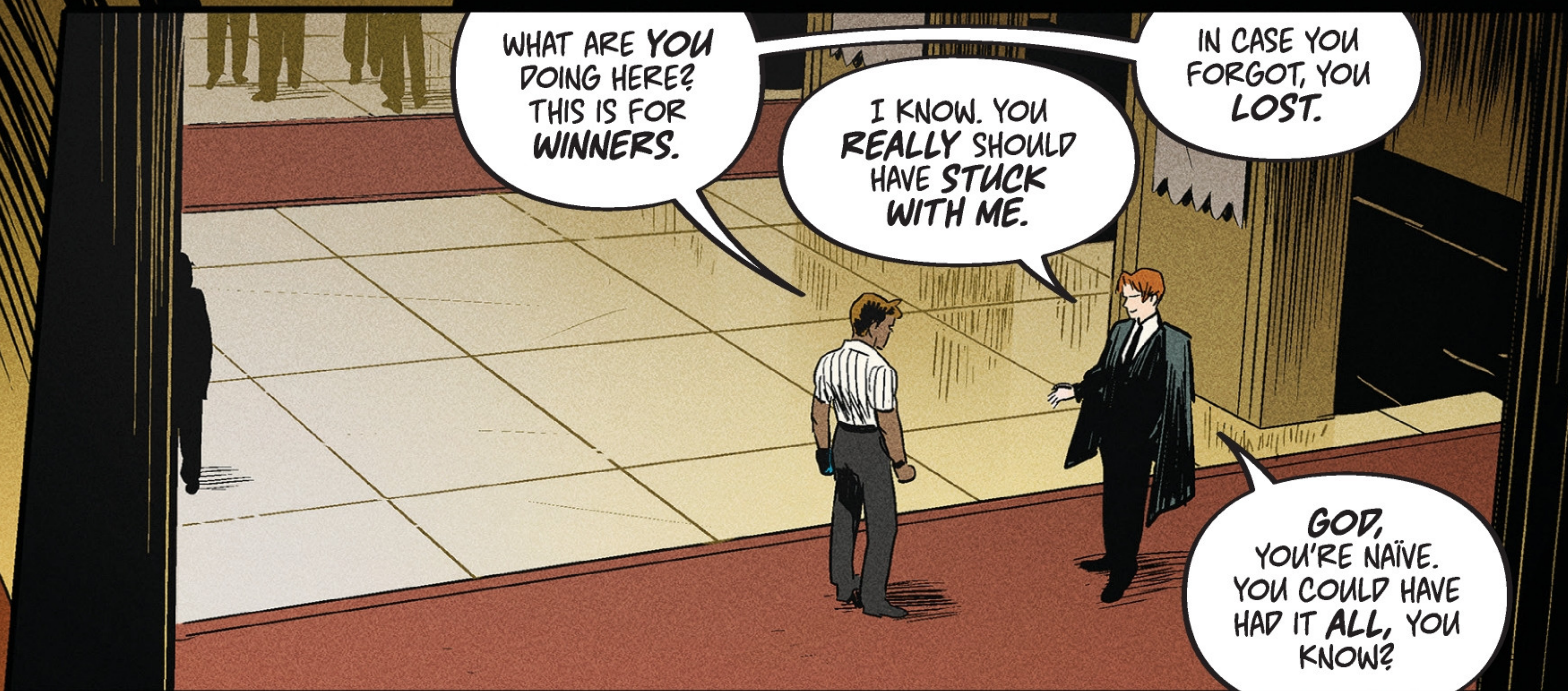
YEAH. CAN'T
BELIEVE IT.

I HAVE
TO TALK TO
HER.

WOW.



I CAN'T
BELIEVE YOU
STILL THINK
YOU'RE IN THE
RUNNING.

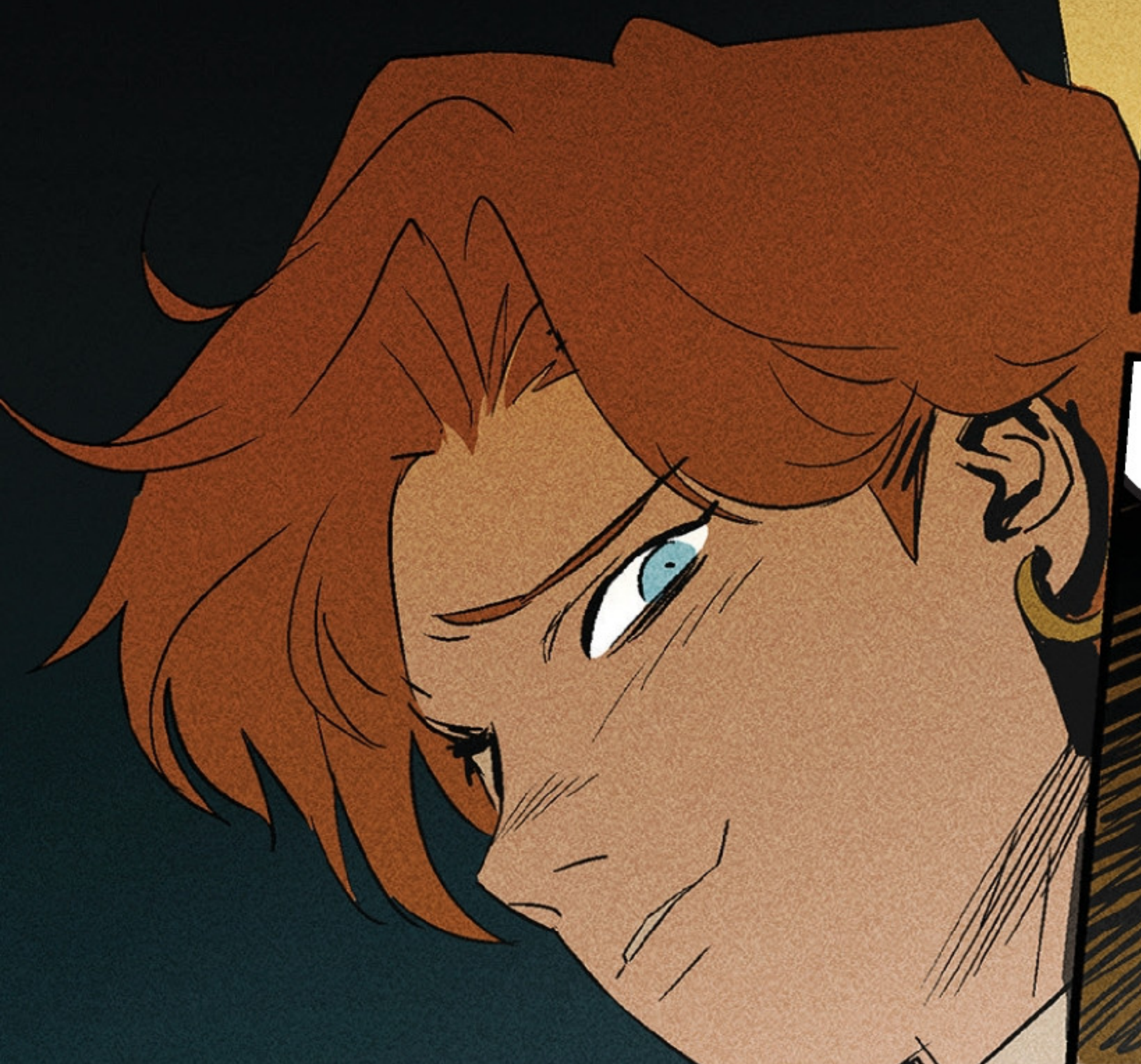


WHAT ARE YOU
DOING HERE?
THIS IS FOR
WINNERS.

I KNOW. YOU
REALLY SHOULD
HAVE STUCK
WITH ME.

IN CASE YOU
FORGOT, YOU
LOST.

GOD,
YOU'RE NAÏVE.
YOU COULD HAVE
HAD IT ALL, YOU
KNOW?



YOU COULD HAVE
HAD FAMILY.

INSTEAD, YOU'VE BECOME
AS STUPID AS YOUR
BROTHER.



WHAT
DID YOU
SAY--

NOW WHILE
I'M HAPPY TO
JUST TALK, THE
OTHER TEAMS
HAVE BIGGER
PLANS.

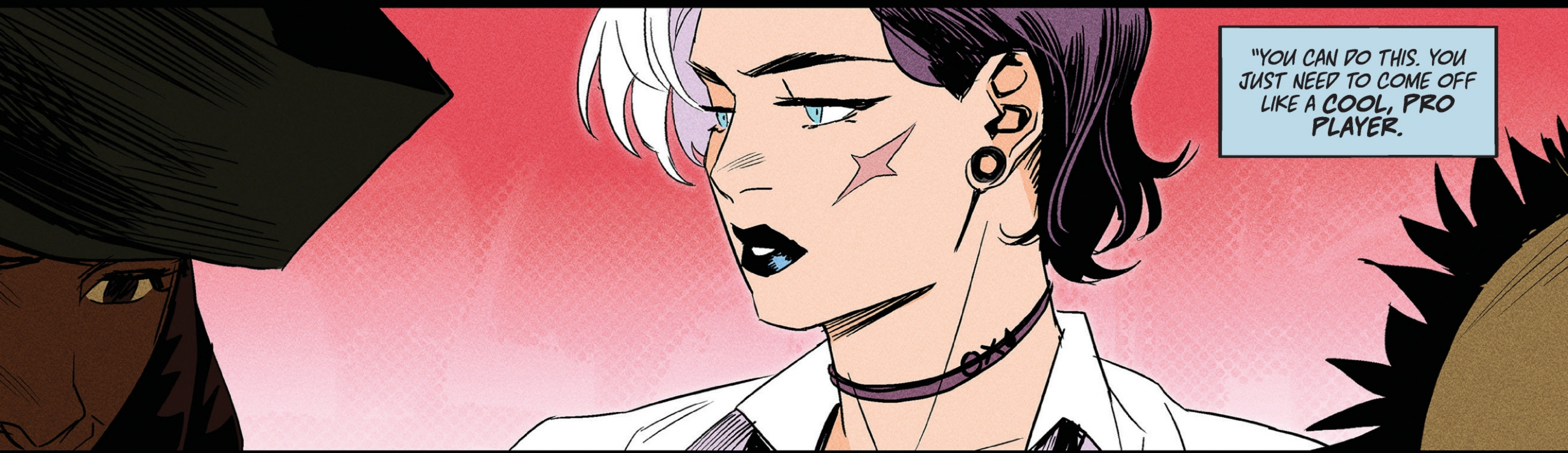
HISSESSSSSSSS...



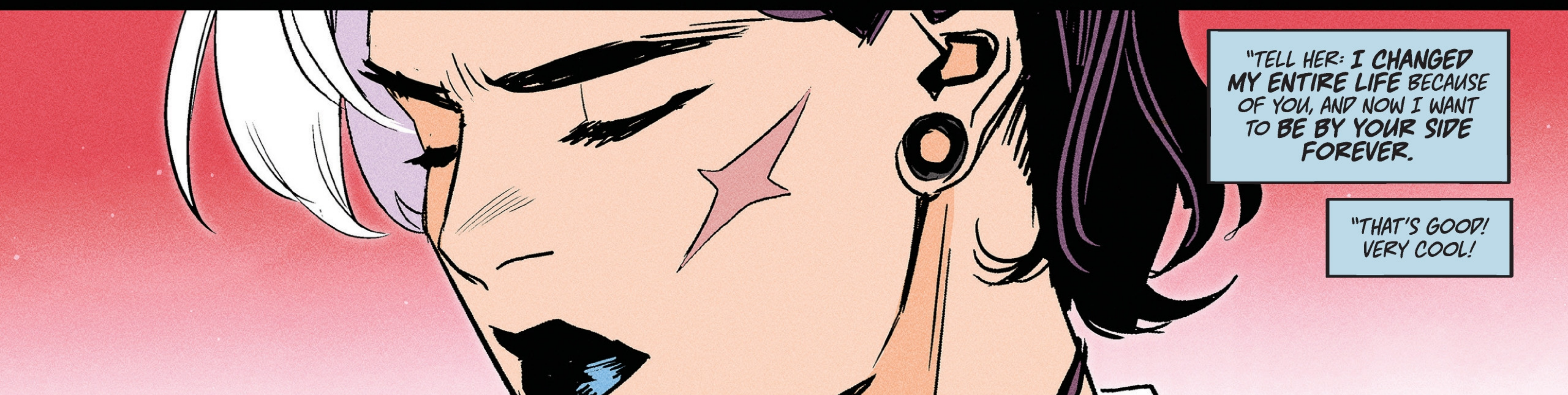
FINALS
ARE TOMORROW...
BUT THINNING THE
COMPETITION
STARTS NOW.



"IT'S HER. THREE FEET
IN FRONT OF YOU."

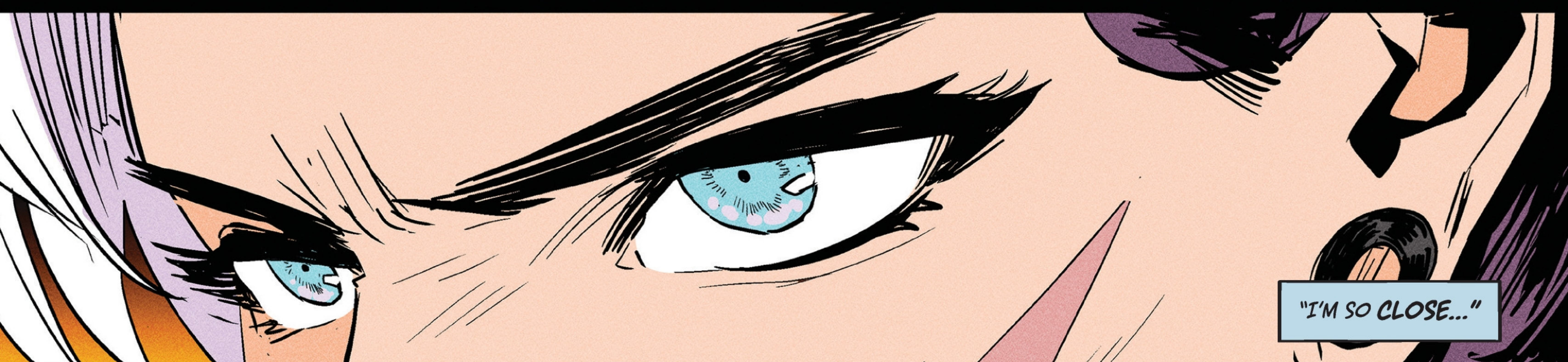


"YOU CAN DO THIS. YOU
JUST NEED TO COME OFF
LIKE A COOL, PRO
PLAYER."



"TELL HER: I CHANGED
MY ENTIRE LIFE BECAUSE
OF YOU, AND NOW I WANT
TO BE BY YOUR SIDE
FOREVER."

"THAT'S GOOD!
VERY COOL!"



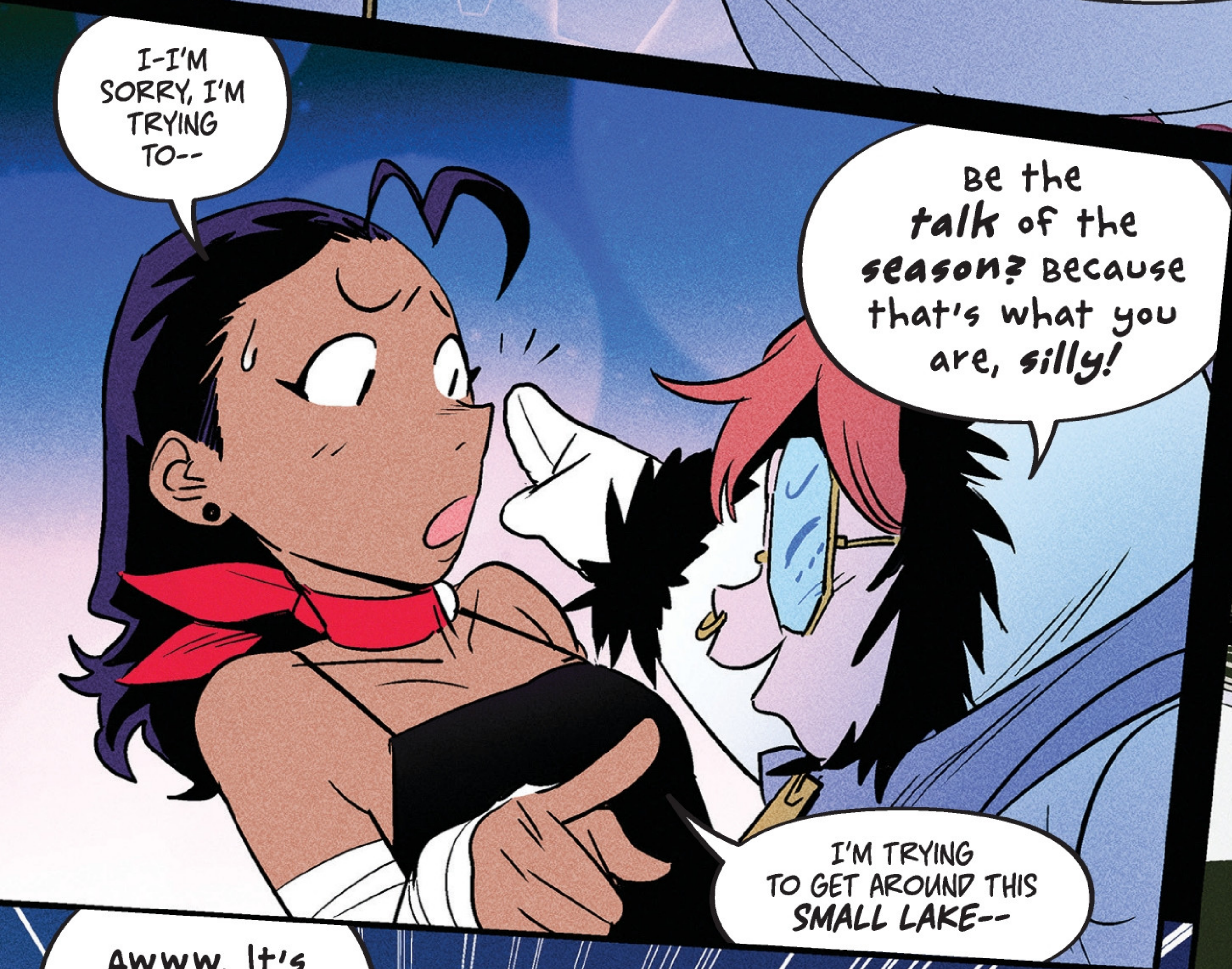
"I'M SO CLOSE..."



AWW, Trini;
Wastelander!



Congratulations
on *getting*
this far!



I-I'M
SORRY, I'M
TRYING
TO--

Be the
talk of the
season? Because
that's what you
are, *silly!*

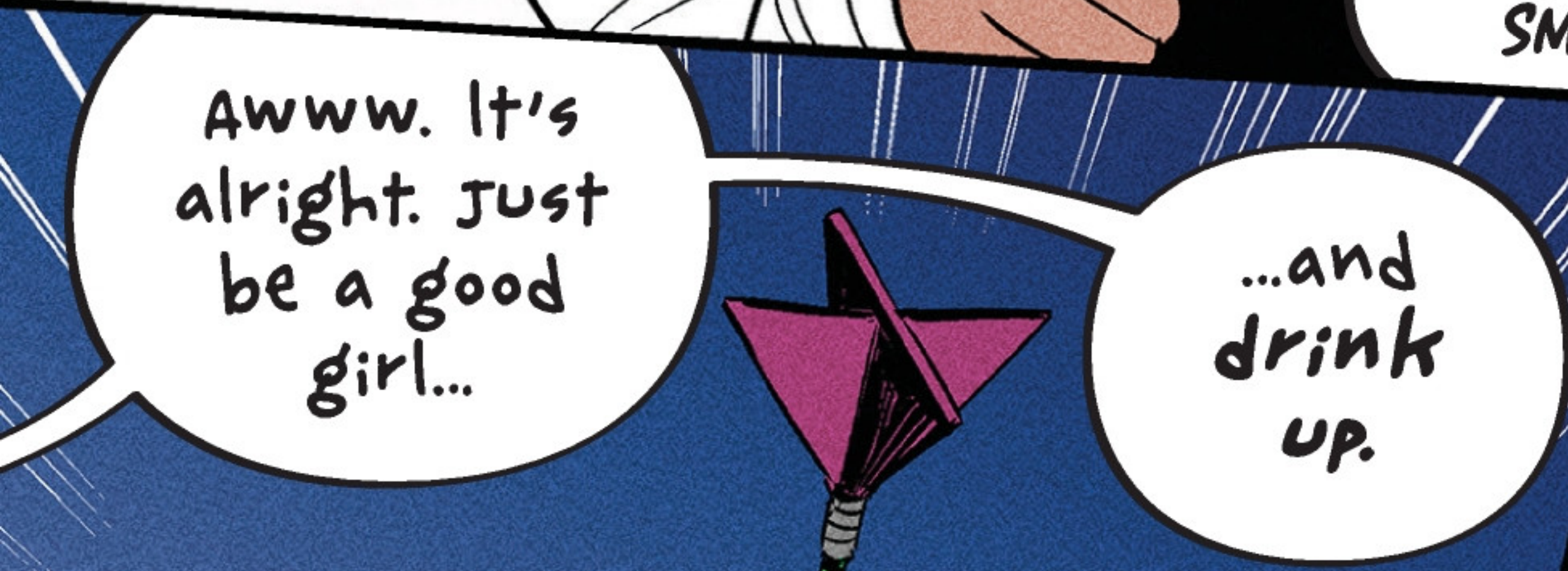
I'M TRYING
TO GET AROUND THIS
SMALL LAKE--



you mean
the *pool?*
HAHAHAH!

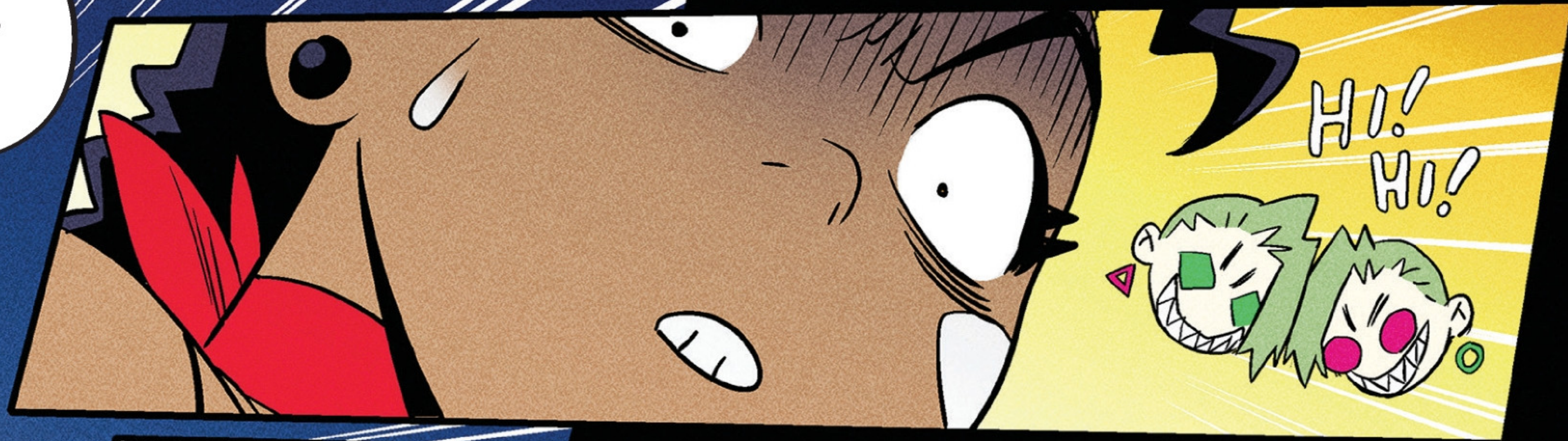
next, you'll
tell me you don't
know about
ice!

UH...

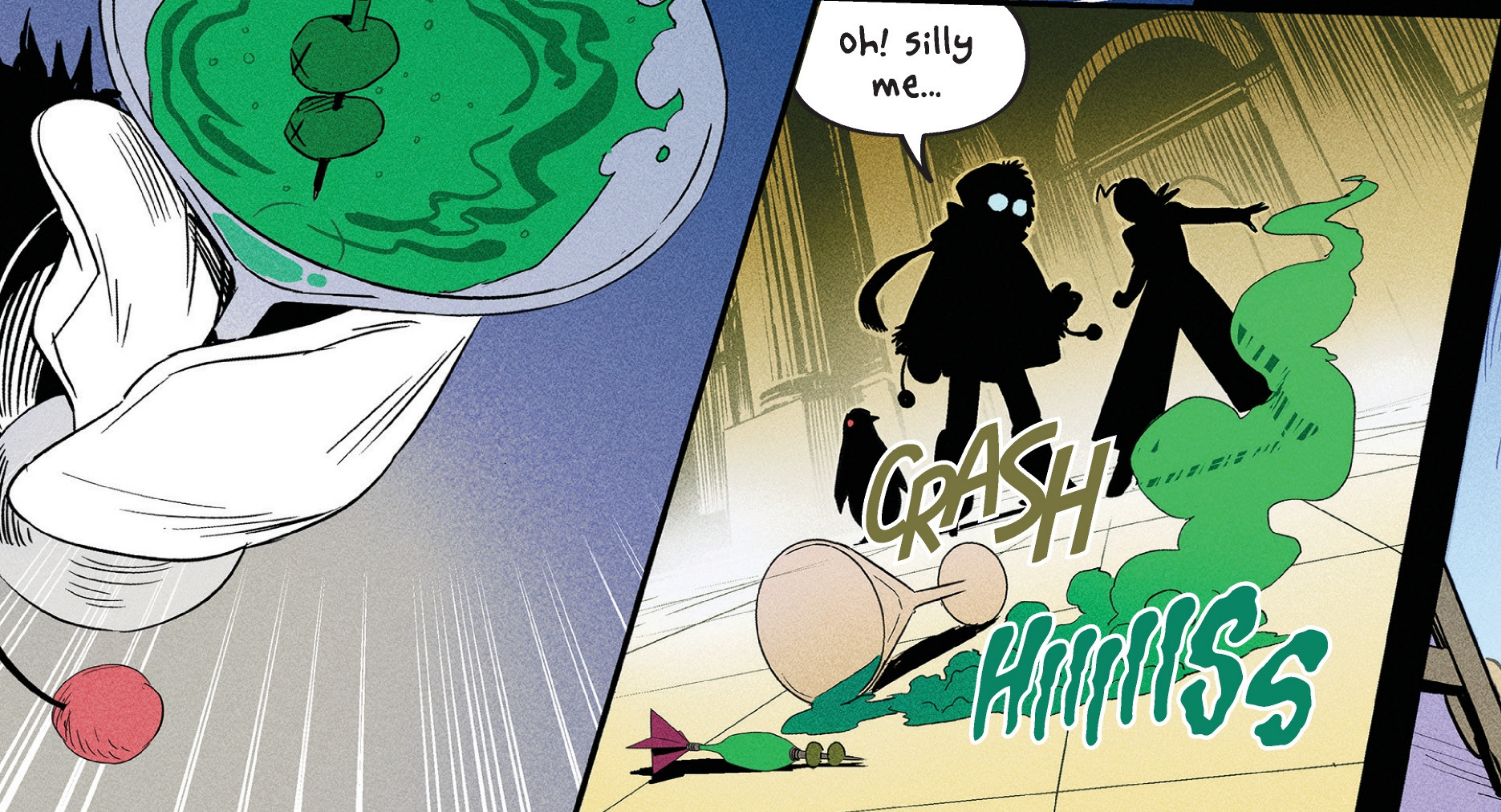


Awww. It's
alright. Just
be a good
girl...

...and
drink
up.

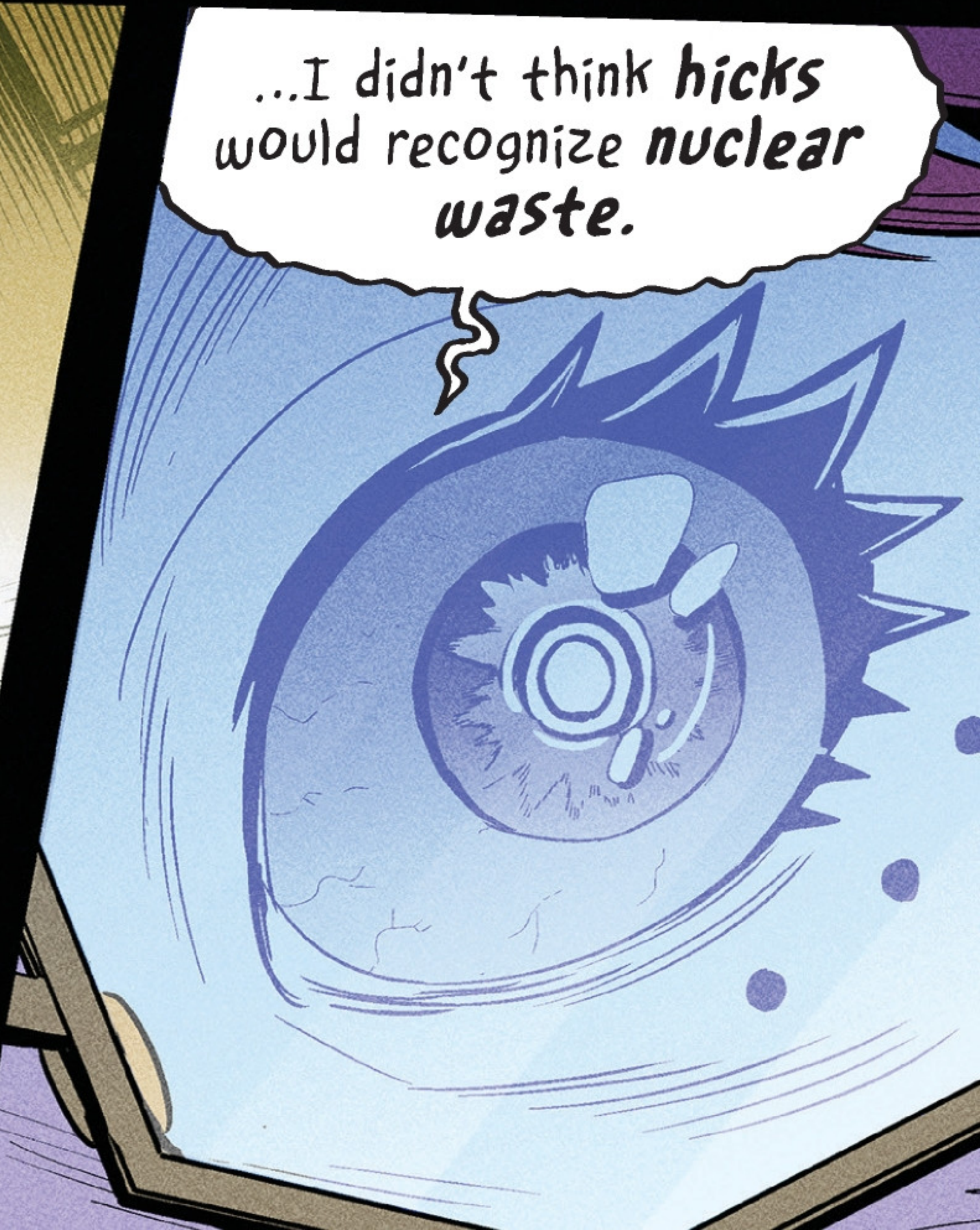


HI!
HI!



oh! silly
me...

CRASH
Hiss



...I didn't think *hicks*
would recognize *nuclear*
waste.



WHY ARE YOU...?

Let's do the **math**. Training, having a team, that takes **money**. Gallons of it.

The Tyrants **pay for all of it**. And we do it to look good in **Mob's eyes**. To rise in status under her rule.

Then she announces she wants **you dead**. Easy-peasy, right?

Except you **survive** our **tyrant surprises**. You beat our teams. Making us look like **fools**.

WHAM

Where do you think that money **comes from**?

They end...

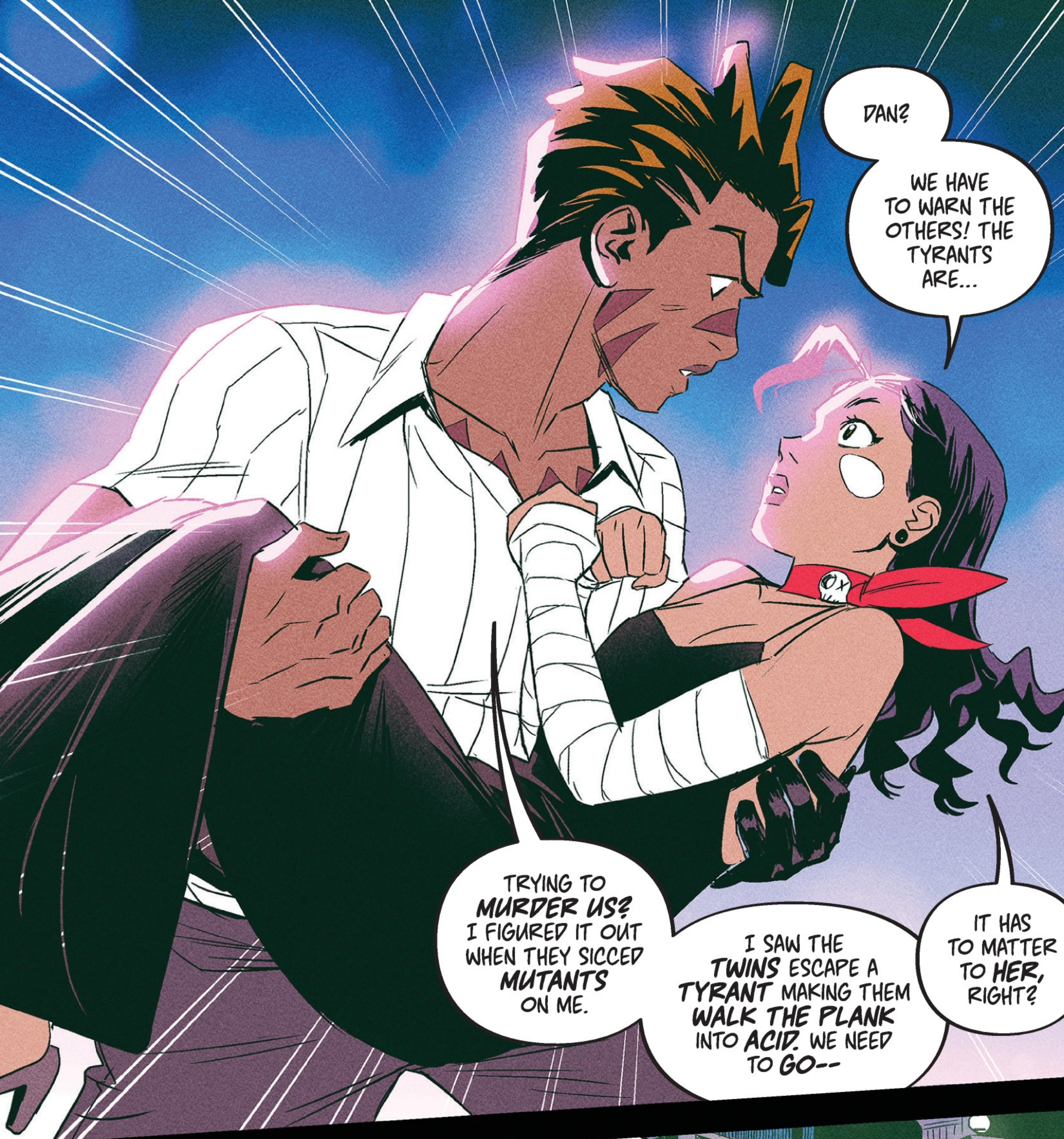
You're a scrappy lil' underdog, Trini Wastelander!

But here's the thing about **underdog stories**.

AHHHH!

...when there's **no more** underdogs.

GRAB



DAN?

WE HAVE
TO WARN THE
OTHERS! THE
TYRANTS
ARE...

TRYING TO
MURDER US?
I FIGURED IT OUT
WHEN THEY SICKED
MUTANTS
ON ME.

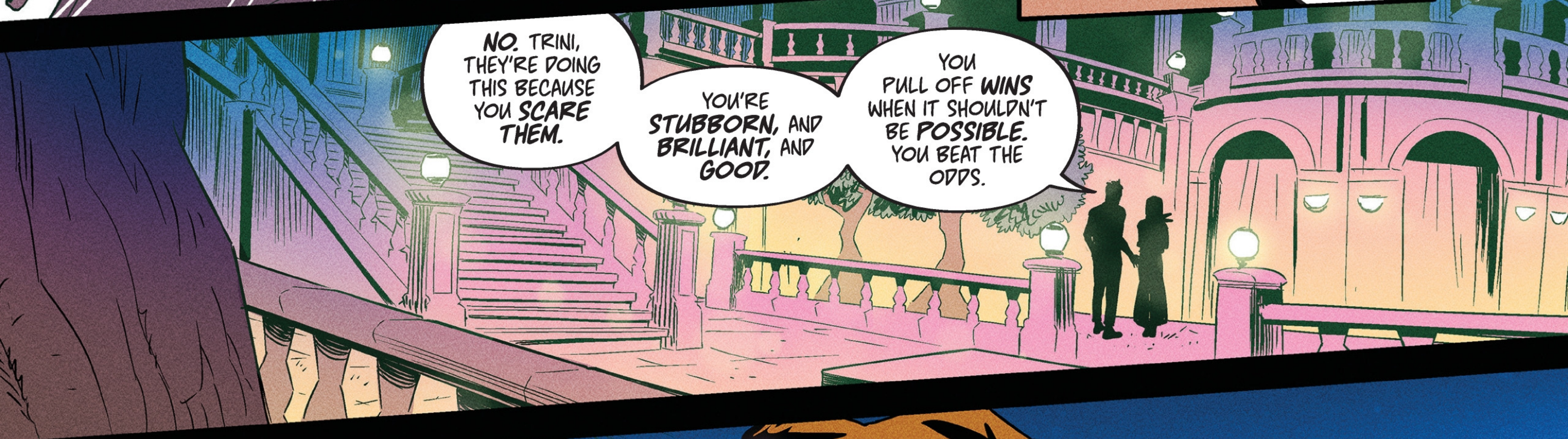
I SAW THE
TWINS ESCAPE A
TYRANT MAKING THEM
WALK THE PLANK
INTO ACID. WE NEED
TO GO--

IT HAS
TO MATTER
TO **HER**,
RIGHT?

WE WON.
THE CROWD
CHEERED. WE
PLAYED **BETTER**
THAN ANYONE TO
GET HERE.

ISN'T THAT
SUPPOSED TO
MATTER?

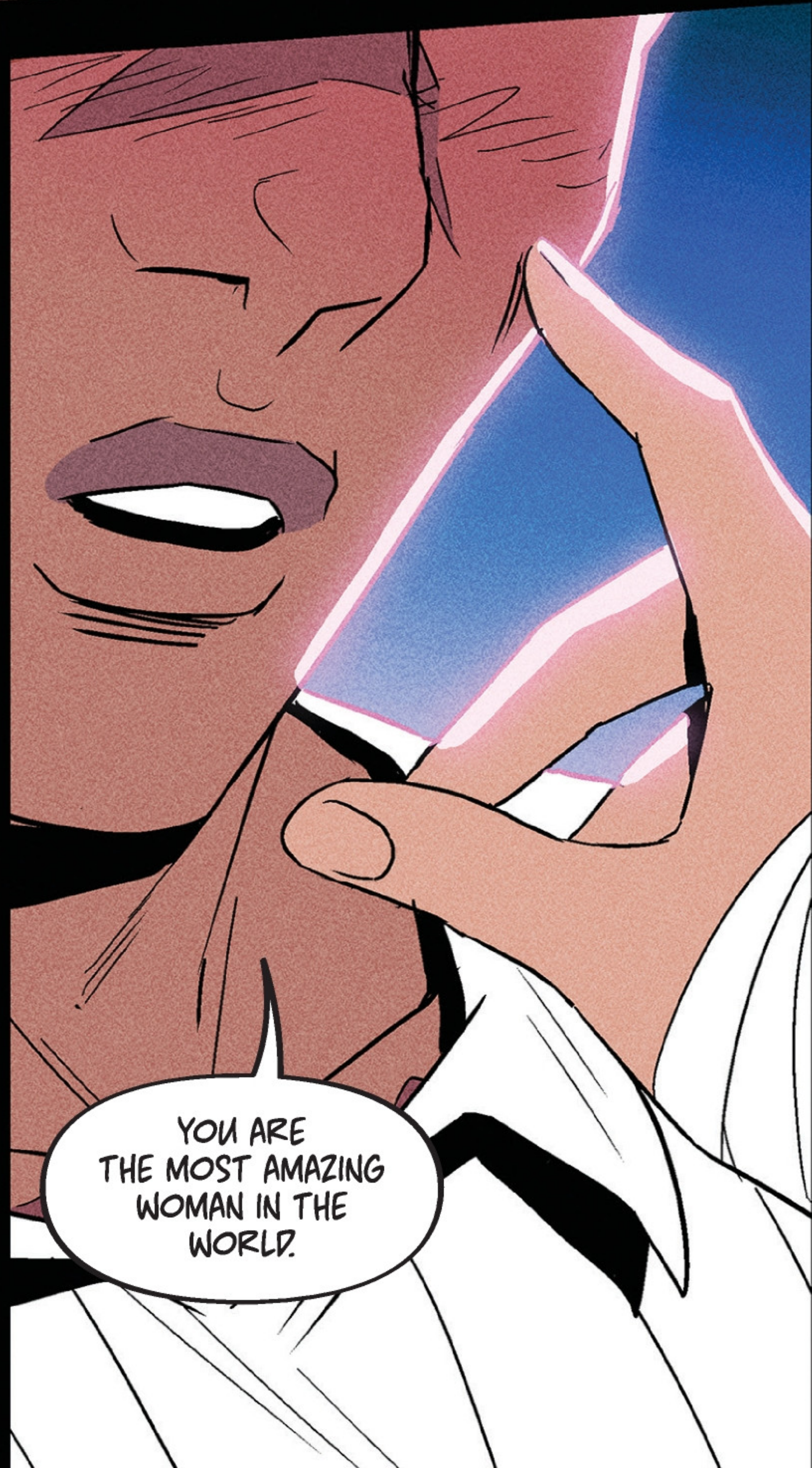
WAS
ALL OF
THIS...FOR
NOTHING?



NO. TRINI,
THEY'RE DOING
THIS BECAUSE
YOU **SCARE**
THEM.

YOU'RE
STUBBORN, AND
BRIGHT, AND
GOOD.

YOU
PULL OFF **WINS**
WHEN IT SHOULDN'T
BE **POSSIBLE**.
YOU BEAT THE
ODDS.

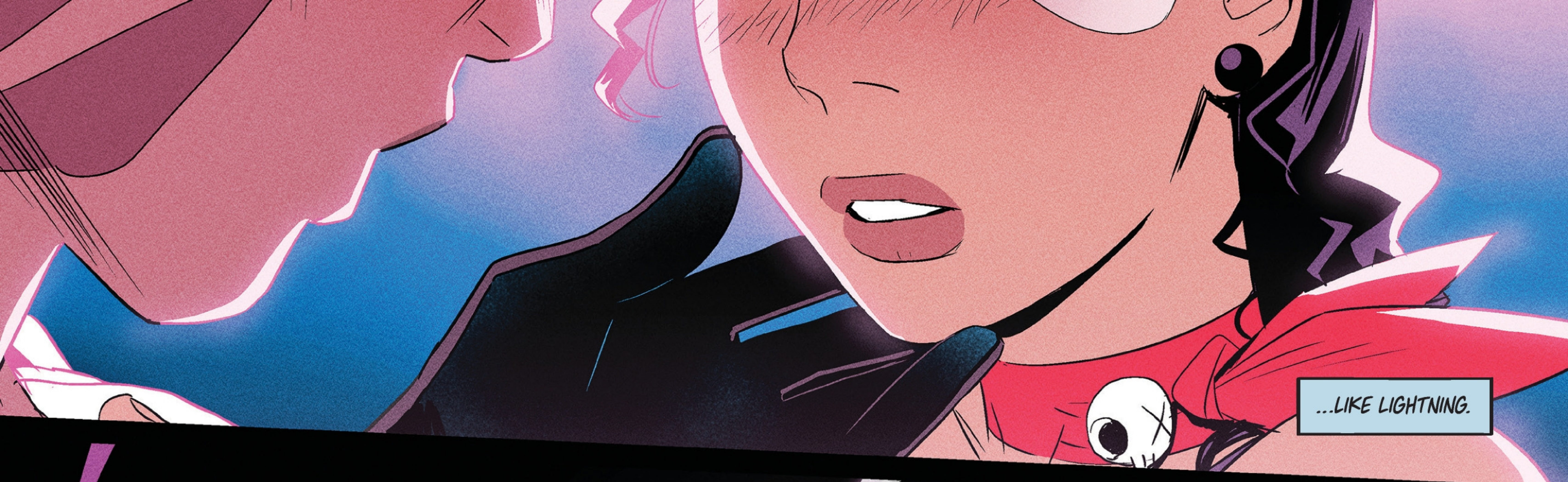


YOU ARE
THE MOST AMAZING
WOMAN IN THE
WORLD.



A-AND...
AND...

THIS FEELING...



...LIKE LIGHTNING.



WAIT--!

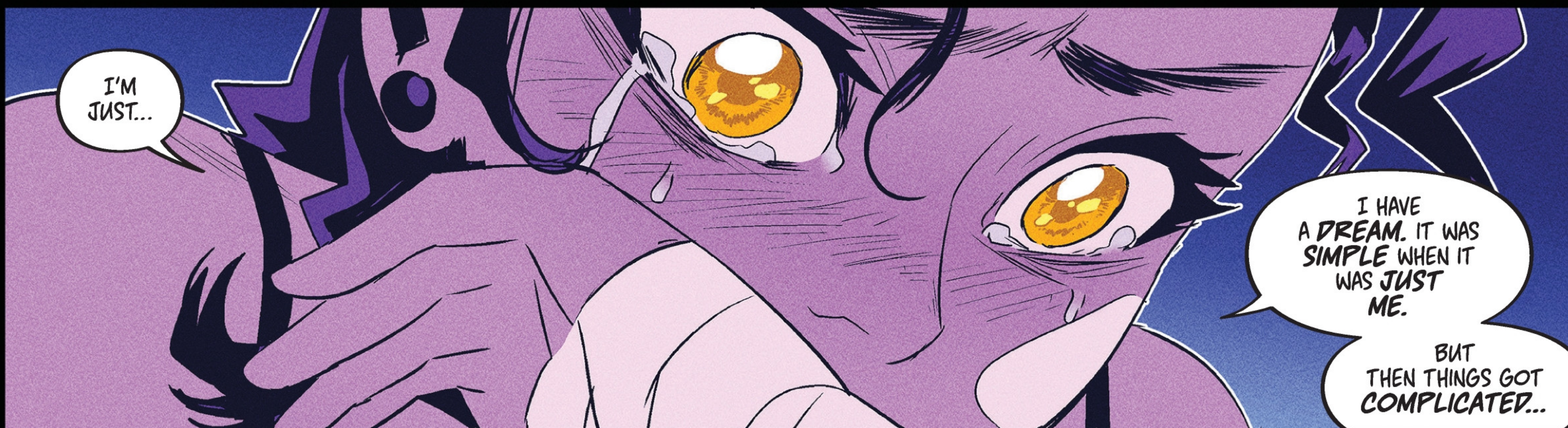


=PANT=
=PANT=

TEARS. AT
A TYRANT'S
BALL.



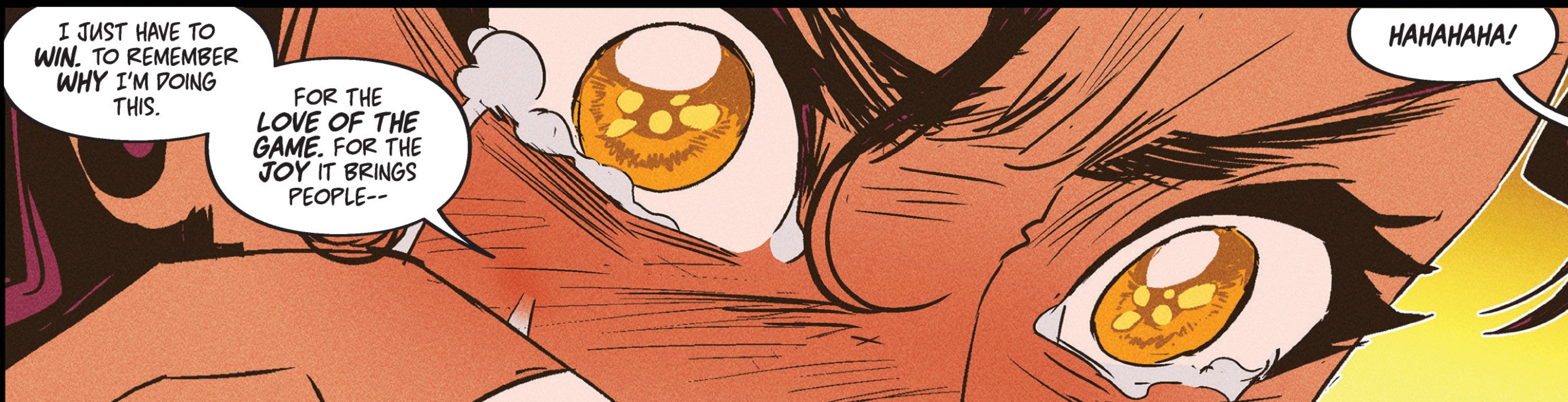
REVEALING YOUR
TRUE FEELINGS
IS NEVER A GOOD
IDEA AMONG
THEM.



I'M JUST...

I HAVE A DREAM. IT WAS SIMPLE WHEN IT WAS JUST ME.

BUT THEN THINGS GOT COMPLICATED...



I JUST HAVE TO WIN. TO REMEMBER WHY I'M DOING THIS.

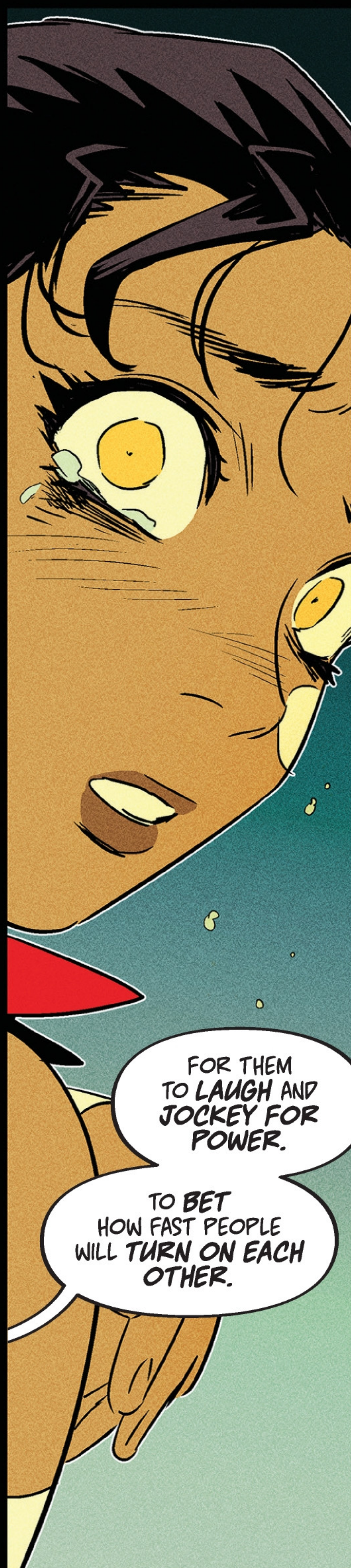
FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME. FOR THE JOY IT BRINGS PEOPLE--

HAHAHAHA!



THE GAME IS NOT FOR YOU. IT'S NOT FOR THE CROWDS.

IT'S FOR THE ONES HOLDING THE PUPPET STRINGS.



FOR THEM TO LAUGH AND JOCKEY FOR POWER.

TO BET HOW FAST PEOPLE WILL TURN ON EACH OTHER.



IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW CLEVER YOU ARE. HOW STRONG.

EVENTUALLY, THERE WILL BE A MATCH WHERE IT'S YOUR LIFE VERSUS YOUR TEAMMATES'.

WHEN THE TIME COMES...YOU'LL KILL THEM YOURSELF.



N-NO... THAT'S NOT TRUE...

THEN WHY ARE YOU CRYING?



WHY DID I
BOTHER...?

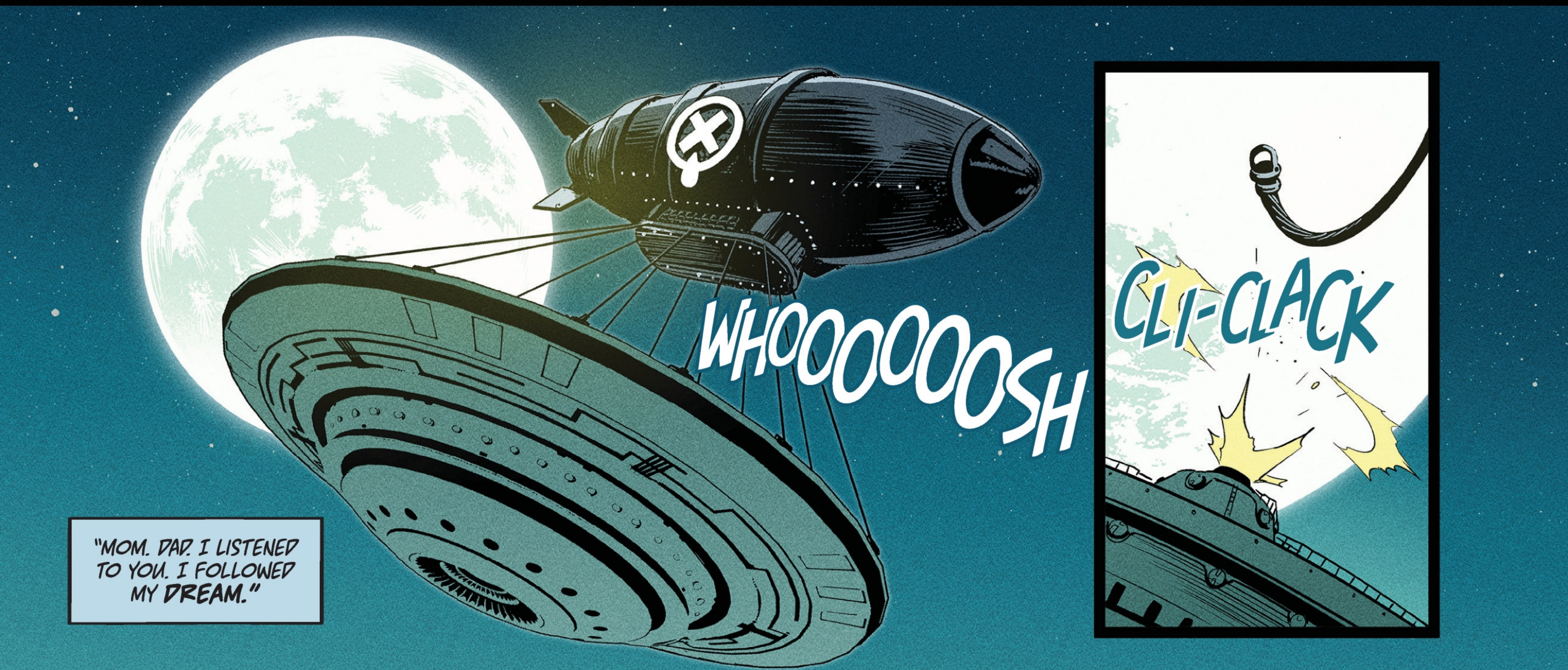
UGH. WHO
CARES?



"THAT GIRL IS GOING TO
DIE TOMORROW."



WHIRL WHIRL



"MOM. DAD I LISTENED
TO YOU. I FOLLOWED
MY DREAM."

WHOOOOOSH

CLI-CLACK

"IS THIS HOW DREAMS
ARE SUPPOSED TO GO?"

WHAM

"THIS DOESN'T FEEL
LIKE WINNING."



IT'S THE
MOMENT YOU'VE
BEEN WAITING
FOR.

BUT THIS
WOULDN'T BE
THE BEAUTIFUL,
BLOODY GAME
IF WE STUCK
TO THE SAME
ROUTINE!

THE FIVE
FINAL TEAMS
ARE HERE TO
COMPETE.

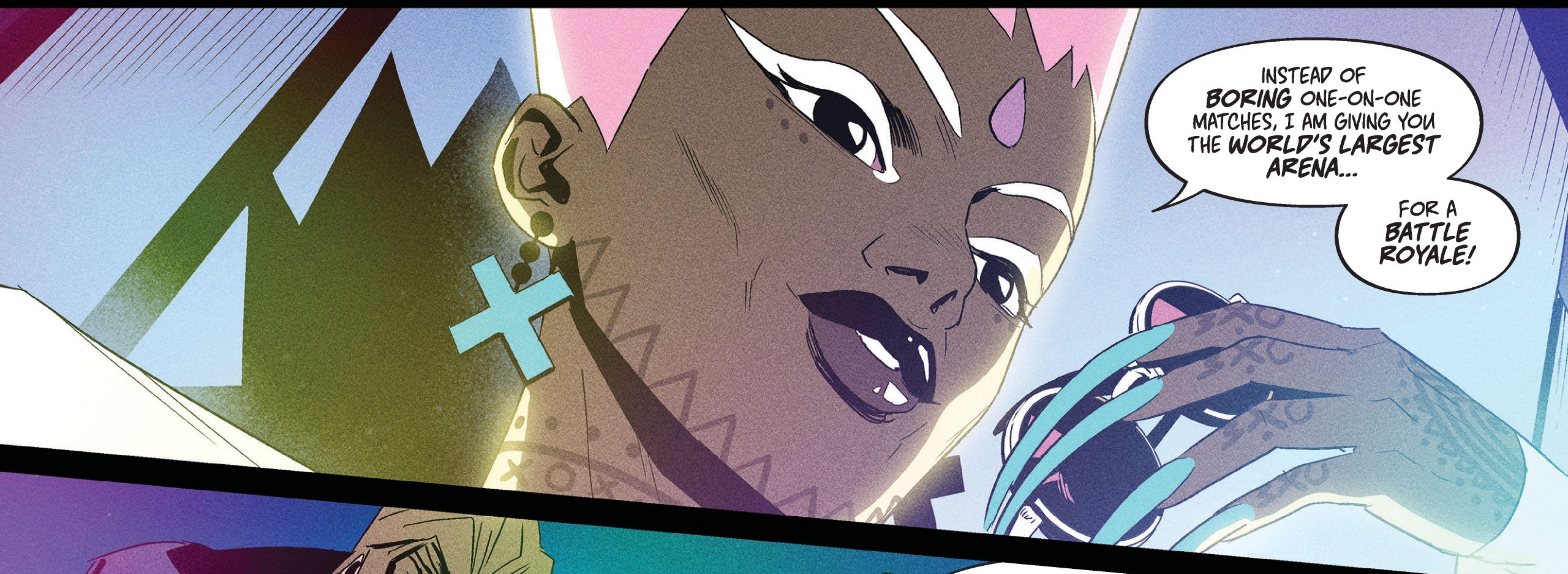
QUEEN
MOB!

I GIVE YOU
THE ARCHITECT
OF TODAY'S LAST
MATCH.

YOUR
LOVELY
OPPRESSOR
AND MINE...

AMERICAN
CITIZENS OF THE
WASTE...

...BOY,
DO I HAVE A
FINALE FOR
YOU!



INSTEAD OF
BORING ONE-ON-ONE
MATCHES, I AM GIVING YOU
THE **WORLD'S LARGEST**
ARENA...

FOR A
BATTLE
ROYALE!

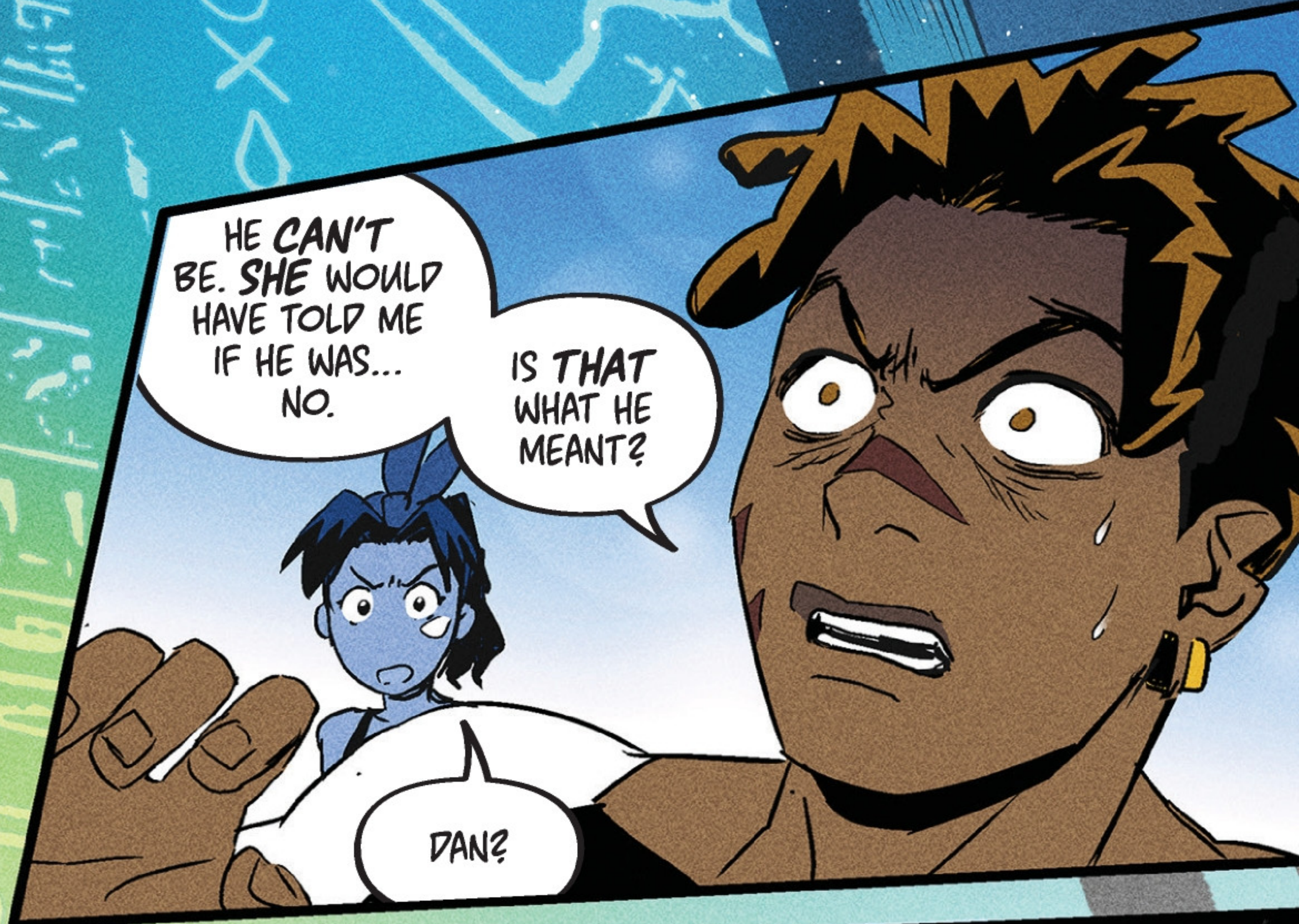


MY **TYRANTS** HAVE
FAILED TO GIVE ME A **TYRANT**
SURPRISE THAT **TRULY**
AMUSES ME.

WHICH IS WHY I GAVE
THE TASK OF COMING UP
WITH TODAY'S **TYRANT**
SURPRISE TO...



MY SON
AND HEIR.



HE **CAN'T**
BE. **SHE** WOULD
HAVE TOLD ME
IF HE WAS...
NO.

IS THAT
WHAT HE
MEANT?

DAN?



AHHH!

SIBLING!

YOU HEARD
THE **DREAD**
OVERLADY!

LET THE
BLOODBATH
BEGIN!



WHAT IS THAT?

AS FOR THE EXTRA SPECIAL TYRANT'S SURPRISE, WE'VE GOT A TREAT FOR YOU!

...I KNOW THAT BLUDGEONING PATTERN.

QUEEN MOB'S RULES SAY SHE CAN MURDER ANYONE AT ANYTIME.

15 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS. NOW 160 KILLS...

CRASH

...SKULL-CRUSHER IS IN PLAY!

You read that right. Trini must go head-to-head with her IDOL...who is trying to KILL HER!
Don't miss our DEADLY FINALE as the first arc comes to a bloody end in
the next issue of **I HEART SKULL-CRUSHER!**

I HEART SKULL-CRUSHER! #5
ON SALE JULY 2024

